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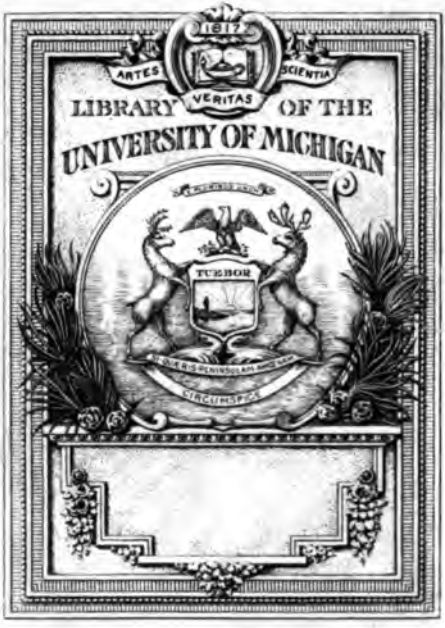
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BY

WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

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INDIAN SUMMER.

XII.

IN his room Colville was devouring as best he might the chagrin with which he had come away from Palazzo Pinti, while he packed his trunk for departure. Now that the thing was over, the worst was past. Again he observed that his emotions had no longer the continuity that the emotions of his youth possessed. As he remembered, a painful or pleasant impression used to last indefinitely; but here he was with this humiliating affair hot in his mind, shrugging his shoulders with a sense of relief, almost a sense of escape. Does the soul really wear out with the body? The question flitted across his mind as he took down a pair of trousers, and noticed that they were considerably frayed about the feet; he determined to give them to Paolo, and this

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reminded him to ring for Paolo, and send word to the office that he was going to take the evening train for Rome.

He went on packing, and putting away with the different garments the unpleasant thoughts that he knew he should be sure to unpack with them in Rome; but they would then have less poignancy. For the present he was doing the best he could, and he was not making any sort of pretences. When his trunk was locked he kindled himself a fire, and sat down before it to think of Imogene. He began with her, but presently it seemed to be Mrs. Bowen that he was thinking of; then he knew he was dropping off to sleep by the manner in which their two ideas mixed. The fatigues and excitements of the week had been great, but he would not give way; it was too disgraceful.

Some one rapped at his door. He called out "*Avanti!*" and he would have been less surprised to see either of those ladies than Paolo with the account he had ordered to be made out. It was a long, pendulous, minutely itemed affair, such as the traveller's recklessness in candles and firewood comes to in the books of the Continental landlord, and it almost swept the floor when its volume was unrolled. But it was not the

sum-total that dismayed Colville when he glanced at the final figure; that, indeed, was not so very great, with all the items; it was the conviction, suddenly flashing upon him, that he had not money enough by him to pay it. His watch, held close to the fire, told him that it was five o'clock; the banks had been closed an hour, and this was Saturday afternoon.

The squalid accident had all the effect of intention, as he viewed it from without himself, and considered that the money ought to have been the first thing in his thoughts after he determined to go away. He must get the money somehow, and be off to Rome by the seven o'clock train. A whimsical suggestion, which was so good a bit of irony that it made him smile, flashed across him: he might borrow it of Mrs. Bowen. She was, in fact, the only person in Florence with whom he was at all on borrowing terms, and a sad sense of the sweetness of her lost friendship followed upon the antic notion. No; for once he could not go to Mrs. Bowen. He recollected now the many pleasant talks they had had together, confidential in virtue of their old acquaintance, and harmlessly intimate in many things. He recalled how, when he was feeling dull

from the Florentine air, she had told him to take a little quinine, and he had found immediate advantage in it. These memories did not strike him as grotesque or ludicrous; he only felt their pathos. He was ashamed even to seem in anywise recreant further. If she should ever hear that he had lingered for thirty-six hours in Florence after he had told her he was going away, what could she think but that he had repented his decision? He determined to go down to the office of the hotel, and see if he could not make some arrangement with the landlord. It would be extremely distasteful, but his ample letter of credit would be at least a voucher of his final ability to pay. As a desperate resort he could go and try to get the money of Mr. Waters.

He put on his coat and hat, and opened the door to some one who was just in act to knock at it, and whom he struck against in the obscurity.

"I beg your pardon," said the visitor.

"Mr. Waters! Is it possible?" cried Colville, feeling something fateful in the chance. "I was just going to see you."

"I'm fortunate in meeting you, then. Shall we go to my room?" he asked, at a hesitation in Colville's manner.

"No, no," said the latter; "come in here." He led the way back into his room, and struck a match to light the candles on his chimney. Their dim rays fell upon the disorder his packing had left. "You must excuse the look of things," he said. "The fact is, I'm just going away. I'm going to Rome at seven o'clock."

"Isn't this rather sudden?" asked the minister, with less excitement than the fact might perhaps have been expected to create in a friend. "I thought you intended to pass the winter in Florence."

"Yes, I did—sit down, please—but I find myself obliged to cut my stay short. Won't you take off your coat?" he asked, taking off his own.

"Thank you; I've formed the habit of keeping it on indoors," said Mr. Waters. "And I oughtn't to stay long, if you're to be off so soon."

Colville gave a very uncomfortable laugh. "Why, the fact is, I'm not off so very soon unless you help me."

"Ah?" returned the old gentleman, with polite interest.

"Yes, I find myself in the absurd position of a man who has reckoned without his host. I have made all my plans for going,

"Ah, I'm sorry. Good-bye, my dear young friend. It 's been a great pleasure to know you." Colville walked down to the door of the hotel with his visitor, and parted with him there. As he turned back he met the landlord, who asked him if he would have the omnibus for the station. The landlord bowed smilingly, after his kind, and rubbed his hands. He said he hoped Colville was pleased with his hotel, and ran to his desk in the little office to get some cards for him, so that he might recommend it accurately to American families.

Colville looked absently at the cards. "The fact is," he said, to the little bowing, smiling man; "I don't know but I shall be obliged to postpone my going till Monday." He smiled too, trying to give the fact a jocose effect, and added, "I find myself out of money, and I 've no means of paying your bill till I can see my bankers."

After all his heroic intention, this was as near as he could come to asking the landlord to let him send the money from Rome.

The little man set his head on one side.

"Oh, well, occupy the room till Monday, then," he cried hospitably. "It is quite at your disposition. You will not want the omnibus?"

"I don't like to have you apply to a stranger," said the old man, with fatherly kindness. "Can't you remain over till Monday? I had a little excursion to propose."

"No, I can't possibly stay; I must go to-night," cried Colville.

The minister rose. "Then I really mustn't detain you, I suppose. Good-bye." He offered his hand. Colville took it, but could not let it go at once. "I would like extremely to tell you why I'm leaving Florence in such haste. But I don't see what good it would do, for I don't want you to persuade me to stay."

The old gentleman looked at him with friendly interest.

"The fact is," Colville proceeded, as if he had been encouraged to do so, "I have had the misfortune—yes, I'm afraid I've had the fault—to make myself very displeasing to Mrs. Bowen, and in such a way that the very least I can do is to take myself off as far and as soon as I conveniently can."

"Yes?" said Mr. Waters, with the cheerful note of incredulity in his voice with which one is apt to respond to others' confession of extremity. "Is it so bad as that; I've

just seen Mrs. Bowen, and she told me you were going."

"Oh," said Colville, with disagreeable sensation, "perhaps she told you why I was going."

"No," answered Mr. Waters; "she didn't do that." Colville imagined a consciousness in him, which perhaps did not exist. "She didn't allude to the subject further than to state the fact, when I mentioned that I was coming to see you."

Colville had dropped his hand. "She was very forbearing," he said, with bitterness that might well have been incomprehensible to Mr. Waters upon any theory but one.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "you are precipitate; perhaps you have mistaken; perhaps you have been hasty. These things are often the result of impulse in women. I have often wondered how they could make up their minds; I believe they certainly ought to be allowed to change them at least once."

Colville turned very red. "What in the world do you mean? Do you imagine that I have been offering myself to Mrs. Bowen?"

"Wasn't it that which you wished to—which you said you would like to tell me?"

Colville was suddenly silent, on the verge

of a self-derisive laugh. When he spoke, he said gently: "No; it wasn't that. I never thought of offering myself to her. We have always been very good friends. But now I 'm afraid we can't be friends any more—at least we can't be acquaintances."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Waters. He waited a while as if for Colville to say more, but the latter remained silent, and the old man gave his hand again in farewell. "I must really be going. I hope you won't think me intrusive in my mistaken conjecture?"

"Oh no."

"It was what I supposed you had been telling me——"

"I understand. You mustn't be troubled," said Colville, though he had to own to himself that it seemed superfluous to make this request of Mr. Waters, who was taking the affair with all the serenity of age concerning matters of sentiment. "I wish you were going to Rome with me," he added, to disembarrass the moment of parting.

"Thank you. But I shall not go to Rome for some years. Shall you come back on your way in the spring?"

"No, I shall not come to Florence again," said Colville sadly.

"Ah, I'm sorry. Good-bye, my dear young friend. It's been a great pleasure to know you." Colville walked down to the door of the hotel with his visitor, and parted with him there. As he turned back he met the landlord, who asked him if he would have the omnibus for the station. The landlord bowed smilingly, after his kind and rubbed his hands. He said he hoped Colville was pleased with his hotel, and ran to his desk in the little office to get some cards for him, so that he might recommend it accurately to American families.

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The little man set his head on one side.

"Oh, well, occupy the room till Monday then," he cried hospitably. "It is quite at your disposition. You will not want the omnibus?"

"No, I shall not want the omnibus," said Colville, with a laugh, doubtless not perfectly intelligible to the landlord, who respectfully joined him in it.

He did not mean to stop that night without writing to Mrs. Bowen, and assuring her that though an accident had kept him in Florence till Monday, she need not be afraid of seeing him again. But he could not go back to his room yet; he wandered about the town, trying to pick himself up from the ruin into which he had fallen again, and wondering with a sort of alien compassion what was to become of his aimless, empty existence. As he passed through the Piazza San Marco he had half a mind to pick a pebble from the gathered margin of the fountain there and toss it against the Rev. Mr. Waters's window, and, when he put his skull-cap out, to ask that optimistic agnostic what a man had best do with a life that had ceased to interest him. But, for the time being, he got rid of himself as he best could by going to the opera. They professed to give *Rigoletto*, but it was all Mrs. Bowen and Imogene Graham to Colville.

It was so late when he got back to his hotel that the outer gate was shut, and he had to wake up the poor little porter, as on

that night when he returned from Madame Uccelli's. The porter was again equal to his duty, and contrived to light a new candle to show him the way to his room. The repetition, almost mechanical, of this small chicane made Colville smile, and this apparently encouraged the porter to ask, as if he supposed him to have been in society somewhere—

"You have amused yourself this evening?"

"Oh, very much."

"I am glad. There is a letter for you."

"A letter! Where?"

"I sent it to your room. It came just before midnight."

XIII.

MRS. Bowen sat before the hearth in her *salon*, with her hands fallen in her lap. At thirty-eight the emotions engrave themselves more deeply in the face than they do in our first youth, or than they will when we have really aged, and the pretty woman looked haggard.

Imogene came in, wearing a long blue robe, flung on as if with desperate haste; her thick hair fell crazily out of a careless knot, down her back. "I couldn't sleep," she said, with quivering lips, at the sight of which Mrs. Bowen's involuntary smile hardened. "Isn't it eleven yet?" she added, with a glance at the clock. "It seems years since I went to bed."

"It 's been a long day," Mrs. Bowen admitted. She did not ask Imogene why she could not sleep, perhaps because she knew already, and was too honest to affect ignorance.

The girl dropped into a chair opposite

her, and began to pull her fingers through the long tangle of her hair, while she drew her breath in sighs that broke at times on her lips; some tears fell down her cheeks unheeded. "Mrs. Bowen," she said, at length, "I should like to know what right we have to drive any one from Florence? I should think people would call it rather a high-handed proceeding if it were known."

Mrs. Bowen met this feebleness promptly. "It isn't likely to be known. But we are not driving Mr. Colville away."

"He is going."

"Yes; he said he would go."

"Don't you believe he will go?"

"I believe he will do what he says."

"He has been very kind to us all; he has been as *good!*"

"No one feels that more than I," said Mrs. Bowen, with a slight tremor in her voice. She faltered a moment. "I can't let you say those things to me, Imogene."

"No; I know it's wrong. I didn't know what I was saying. Oh, I wish I could tell what I ought to do! I wish I could make up my mind. Oh, I can't let him go—*so*. I—I don't know what to think any more. Once it was clear, but now I'm not sure; no, I'm not sure."

"Not sure about what?"

"I think I am the one to go away, if any one."

"You know you can't go away," said Mrs. Bowen, with weary patience.

"No, of course not. Well, I shall never see any one like him."

Mrs. Bowen made a start in her chair, as if she had no longer the power to remain quiet, but only placed herself a little more rigidly in it.

"No," the girl went on, as if uttering a hopeless reverie. "He made every moment interesting. He was always thinking of us —he never thought of himself. He did as much for Effie as for any one; he tried just as hard to make himself interesting to her. He was unselfish. I have seen him at places being kind to the stupidest people. You never caught him choosing out the stylish or attractive ones, or trying to shine at anybody's expense. Oh, he 's a true gentleman —I shall always say it. How delicate he was, never catching you up, or if you said a foolish thing, trying to turn it against you. No, never, never, never! Oh dear! And now, what can he think of me? Oh, how frivolous and fickle and selfish he must think me!"

"Imogene!" Mrs. Bowen cried out, but quelled herself again.

"Yes," pursued the girl, in the same dreary monotone, "he thinks I couldn't appreciate him because he was old. He thinks that I cared for his not being handsome! Perhaps—perhaps——" She began to catch her breath in the effort to keep back the sobs that were coming. "Oh, I can't bear it! I would rather die than let him think it—such a thing as that!" She bent her head aside, and cried upon the two hands with which she clutched the top of her chair.

Mrs. Bowen sat looking at her distractedly. From time to time she seemed to silence a word upon her lips, and in fact she did not speak.

Imogene lifted her head at last, and softly dried her eyes. Then, as she pushed her handkerchief back into the pocket of her robe, "What sort of looking girl was that other one?"

"That other one?"

"Yes; you know what I mean: the one who behaved so badly to him before."

"Imogene!" said Mrs. Bowen severely, "this is nonsense, and I can't let you go on so. I might pretend not to know what you

mean; but I won't do that; and I tell you that there is no sort of likeness—of comparison——"

"No, no," wailed the girl, "there *is* none. I feel that. She had nothing to warn her—he hadn't suffered then; he was young; he was able to bear it—you said it yourself, Mrs. Bowen. But now—*now*, what will he do? He could make fun of that, and not hate her so much, because she didn't know how much harm she was doing. But I did; and what can he think of me?"

Mrs. Bowen looked across the barrier between them, that kept her from taking Imogene into her arms, and laughing and kissing away her craze, with cold dislike, and only said, "You know whether you 've really anything to accuse yourself of, Imogene. I can't and won't consider Mr. Colville in the matter; I *didn't* consider him in what I said to-day. And I tell you again that I will not interfere with you in the slightest degree beyond appearances and the responsibility I feel to your mother. And it 's for you to know your own mind. You are old enough. I will do what you say. It 's for you to be sure that you wish what you say."

"Yes," said Imogene huskily, and she let

an interval that was long to them both elapse before she said anything more. "Have I always done what you thought best, Mrs. Bowen?"

"Yes, I have never complained of you."

"Then why can't you tell me now what you think best?"

"Because there is nothing to be done. It is all over."

"But if it were not, would you tell me?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I—couldn't."

"Then I take back my promise not to write to Mr. Colville. I am going to ask him to stay."

"Have you made up your mind to that, Imogene?" asked Mrs. Bowen, showing no sign of excitement, except to take a faster hold of her own wrists with the slim hands in which she had caught them.

"Yes."

"You know the position it places you in?"

"What position?"

"Has he offered himself to you?"

"No!" the girl's face blazed.

"Then, after what's passed, this is the same as offering yourself to him."

Imogene turned white. "I must write to him, unless you forbid me."

"Certainly I shall not forbid you." Mrs. Bowen rose and went to her writing-desk. "But if you have fully made up your mind to this step, and are ready for the consequences, whatever they are——" She stopped, before sitting down, and looked back over her shoulder at Imogene.

"Yes," said the girl, who had also risen.

"Then I will write to Mr. Colville for you, and render the proceeding as little objectionable as possible."

Imogene made no reply. She stood motionless while Mrs. Bowen wrote.

"Is this what you wished?" asked the latter, offering the sheet:—

"DEAR MR. COLVILLE,—I have reasons for wishing to recall my consent to your going away. Will you not come and lunch with us to-morrow, and try to forget everything that has passed during a few days?

"Yours very sincerely,

"EVALINA BOWEN."

"Yes, that will do," gasped Imogene.

Mrs. Bowen rang the bell for the porter, and stood with her back to the girl, waiting for him at the salon door. He came after a delay that sufficiently intimated the lateness

of the hour. "This letter must go at once to the Hotel d'Atene," said Mrs. Bowen peremptorily.

"You shall be served," said the porter, with fortitude.

As Mrs. Bowen turned, Imogene ran toward her with clasped hands. "Oh, how merciful—how good——"

Mrs. Bowen shrank back. "Don't touch me, Imogene, please!"

It was her letter which Colville found on his table and read by the struggling light of his newly acquired candle. Then he sat down and replied to it.

"DEAR MRS. BOWEN,—I know that you mean some sort of kindness by me, and I hope you will not think me prompted by any poor resentment in declining to-morrow's lunch. I am satisfied that it is best for me to go; and I am ashamed not to be gone already. But a ridiculous accident has kept me, and when I came in and found your note I was just going to write and ask your patience with my presence in Florence till Monday morning.

"Yours sincerely,

"THEODORE COLVILLE."

He took his note down to the porter, who had lain down again in his little booth, but sprang up with a cheerful request to be com-

manded. Colville consulted him upon the propriety of sending the note to Palazzo Pinti at once, and the porter, with his head laid in deprecation upon one of his lifted shoulders, owned that it was perhaps the very least little bit in the world late.

"Send it the first thing in the morning, then," said Colville.

Mrs. Bowen received it by the servant who brought her coffee to the room, and she sent it without any word to Imogene. The girl came instantly back with it. She was fully dressed, as if she had been up a long time, and she wore a very plain, dull dress, in which one of her own sex might have read the expression of a potential self-devotion.

"It 's just as I wish it, Mrs. Bowen," she said, in a low key of impassioned resolution. "*Now* my conscience is at rest. And you have done this for me, Mrs. Bowen!" She stood timidly with the door in her hand, watching Mrs. Bowen's slight smile; then, as if at some sign in it, she flew to the bed and kissed her, and so fled out of the room again.

Colville slept late, and awoke with a vague sense of self-reproach, which faded afterward to such poor satisfaction as comes to us from the consciousness of having made

the best of a bad business; some pangs of softer regret mixed with this. At first he felt a stupid obligation to keep indoors, and he really did not go out till after lunch. The sunshine had looked cold from his window, and with the bright fire which he found necessary in his room, he fancied a bitterness in the gusts that caught up the dust in the piazza, and blew it against the line of cabs on the other side; but when he got out into the weather he found the breeze mild and the sun warm. The streets were thronged with people, and at all the corners there were groups of cloaked and overcoated talkers, soaking themselves full of the sunshine. The air throbbed, as always, with the sound of bells, but it was a mellower and opener sound than before, and looking at the purple bulk of one of those hills which seem to rest like clouds at the end of each avenue in Florence, Colville saw that it was clear of snow. He was going up through Via Cavour to find Mr. Waters and propose a walk, but he met him before he had got half-way to San Marco.

The old man was at a momentary stand-still, looking up at the Riccardi Palace, and he received Colville with apparent forgetfulness of anything odd in his being still in

Florence. "Upon the whole," he said, without preliminary of any sort, as Colville turned and joined him in walking on, "I don't know any homicide that more distinctly proves the futility of assassination as a political measure than that over yonder." He nodded his head sidewise toward the palace as he shuffled actively along at Colville's elbow.

"You might say that the moment when Lorenzino killed Alessandro was the most auspicious for a deed of that kind. The Medici had only recently been restored; Alessandro was the first ruler in Florence who had worn a title; no more reckless, brutal, and insolent tyrant ever lived, and his right, even such as the Medici might have, to play the despot was involved in the doubt of his origin; the heroism of the great siege ought still to have survived in the people who withstood the forces of the whole German Empire for fifteen months; it seems as if the taking off of that single wretch should have ended the whole Medicean domination; but there was not a voice raised to second the homicide's appeal to the old love of liberty in Florence. The Medici party were able to impose a boy of eighteen upon the most fiery democracy that ever existed,

and to hunt down and destroy Alessandro's murderer at their leisure. No," added the old man thoughtfully, "I think that the friends of progress must abandon assassination as invariably useless. The trouble was not that Alessandro was alive, but that Florence was dead. Assassination always comes too early or too late in any popular movement. It may be," said Mr. Waters, with a carefulness to do justice to assassination which made Colville smile, "that the modern scientific spirit may be able to evolve something useful from the principle, but considering the enormous abuses and perversions to which it is liable, I am very doubtful of it—very doubtful."

Colville laughed. "I like your way of bringing a fresh mind to all these questions in history and morals, whether they are conventionally settled or not. Don't you think the modern scientific spirit could evolve something useful out of the old classic idea of suicide?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Waters; "I haven't yet thought it over. The worst thing about suicide—and this must always rank it below political assassination—is that its interest is purely personal. No man ever kills himself for the good of others."

"That 's certainly against it. We oughtn't to countenance such an abominably selfish practice. But you can't bring that charge against euthanasy. What have you to say of that?"

"I have heard one of the most benevolent and tender-hearted men I ever knew defend it in cases of hopeless suffering. But I don't know that I should be prepared to take his ground. There appears to be something so sacred about human life that we must respect it even in spite of the prayers of the sufferer who asks us to end his irremediable misery."

"Well," said Colville, "I suspect we must at least class murder with the ballet as a means of good. One might say there was still some virtue in the primal, eldest curse against bloodshed."

"Oh, I don't by any means deny those things," said the old man, with the air of wishing to be scrupulously just. "Which way are you walking?"

"Your way, if you will let me," replied Colville. "I was going to your house to ask you to take a walk with me."

"Ah, that 's good. I was reading of the great siege last night, and I thought of taking a look at Michelangelo's bastions.

Let us go together, if you don't think you 'll find it too fatiguing."

"I shall be ashamed to complain if I do."

"And you didn't go to Rome after all?" said Mr. Waters.

"No; I couldn't face the landlord with a petition so preposterous as mine. I told him that I found I had no money to pay his bill till I had seen my banker, and as he didn't propose that I should send him the amount back from Rome, I stayed. Landlords have their limitations; they are not imaginative, as a class."

"Well, a day more will make no great difference to you, I suppose," said the old man, "and a day less would have been a loss to me. I shall miss you."

"Shall you, indeed?" asked Colville, with a grateful stir of the heart. "It 's very nice of you to say that."

"Oh no. I meet few people who are willing to look at life objectively with me, and I have fancied some such willingness in you. What I chiefly miss over here is a philosophic lift in the human mind, but probably that is because my opportunities of meeting the best minds are few, and my means of conversing with them are small.

If I had not the whole past with me, I should feel lonely at times."

"And is the past such good company always?"

"Yes, in a sense it is. The past is humanity set free from circumstance, and history studied where it was once life is the past rehumanised."

As if he found this rarefied air too thin for his lungs, Colville made some ineffectual gasps at response, and the old man continued: "What I mean is that I meet here the characters I read of, and commune with them before their errors were committed, before they had condemned themselves to failure, while they were still wise and sane, and still active and vital forces."

"Did they all fail? I thought some of the bad fellows had a pretty fair worldly success?"

"The blossom of decay."

"Oh! what black pessimism!"

"Not at all! Men fail but man succeeds. I don't know what it all means, or any part of it; but I have had moods in which it seemed as if the whole secret of the mystery were about to flash upon me. Walking along in the full sun, in the midst of men, or sometimes in the solitude of midnight,

poring over a book, and thinking of quite other things, I have felt that I had almost surprised it."

"But never quite?"

"Oh, it isn't too late yet."

"I hope you won't have your revelation before I get away from Florence, or I shall see them burning you here like the great *frate*."

They had been walking down the Via Calzioli from the Duomo, and now they came out into the Piazza della Signoria, suddenly, as one always seems to do, upon the rise of the old palace and the leap of its tower into the blue air. The history of all Florence is there, with memories of every great time in bronze or marble, but the supreme presence is the martyr who hangs for ever from the gibbet over the quenchless fire in the midst.

"Ah, they *had* to kill him!" sighed the old man. "It has always been so with the benefactors. They have always meant mankind more good than any one generation can bear, and it must turn upon them and destroy them."

"How will it be with you, then, when you have read us 'the riddle of the painful earth'?"

"That will be so simple that every one

will accept it willingly and gladly, and wonder that no one happened to think of it before. And, perhaps, the world is now grown old enough and docile enough to receive the truth without resentment."

"I take back my charge of pessimism," said Colville. "You are an optimist of the deepest dye."

They walked out of the Piazza and down to the Lung' Arno, through the corridor of the Uffizzi, where the illustrious Florentines stand in marble under the arches, all reconciled and peaceful and equal at last. Colville shivered a little as he passed between the silent ranks of the statues.

"I can't stand those fellows, to-day. They seem to feel such a smirk satisfaction at having got out of it all."

They issued upon the river, and he went to the parapet and looked down on the water. "I wonder," he mused aloud, "if it has the same Sunday look to these Sabbathless Italians as it has to us."

"No; Nature isn't puritan," replied the old minister.

"Not at Haddam East Village?"

"No; there less than here; for she 's had to make a harder fight for her life there."

"Ah, then you believe in Nature—you're

a friend of Nature?" asked Colville, following the lines of an oily swirl in the current with indolent eye.

"Only up to a certain point." Mr. Waters seemed to be patient of any direction which the other might be giving the talk. "Nature is a savage. She has good impulses, but you can't trust her altogether."

"Do you know," said Colville, "I don't think there's very much of her left in us after we reach a certain point in life? She drives us on at a great pace for a while, and then some fine morning we wake up and find that Nature has got tired of us and has left us to taste and conscience. And taste and conscience are by no means so certain of what they want you to do as Nature was."

"Yes," said the minister, "I see what you mean." He joined Colville in leaning on the parapet, and he looked out on the river as if he saw his meaning there. "But by the time we reach that point in life most of us have got the direction which Nature meant us to take, and there's no longer any need of her driving us on."

"And what about the unlucky fellows who haven't got the direction, or haven't kept it?"

"They had better go back to it."

"But if Nature herself seemed to change her mind about you?"

"Ah, you mean persons of weak will. They are a great curse to themselves and to everybody else."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Colville. "I've seen cases in which a strong will looked very much more like the devil."

"Yes, a perverted will. But there can be no good without a strong will. A weak will means inconstancy. It means, even in good, good attempted and relinquished, which is always a terrible thing, because it is sure to betray some one who relied upon its accomplishment."

"And in evil? Perhaps the evil, attempted and relinquished, turns into good."

"Oh, never!" replied the minister fervently. "There is something very mysterious in what we call evil. Apparently it has infinitely greater force and persistence than good. I don't know why it should be so. But so it appears."

"You'll have the reason of that along with the rest of the secret when your revelation comes," said Colville, with a smile. He lifted his eyes from the river, and looked up over the clustering roofs beyond it to the hills beyond them, flecked to the crest of

their purple slopes with the white of villas and villages. As if something in the beauty of the wonderful prospect had suggested the vision of its opposite, he said dreamily, "I don't think I shall go to Rome to-morrow, after all. I will go to Des Vaches! Where did you say you were walking, Mr. Waters? Oh yes! You told me. I will cross the bridge with you. But I couldn't stand anything quite so vigorous as the associations of the siege this afternoon. I'm going to the Boboli Gardens, to debauch myself with a final sense of nerveless despotism, as it expressed itself in marble allegory and formal alleys. The fact is, that if I stay with you any longer I shall tell you something that I'm too old to tell and you're too old to hear." The old man smiled, but offered no urgence or comment, and at the thither end of the bridge Colville said hastily, "Good-bye. If you ever come to Des Vaches, look me up."

"Good-bye," said the minister. "Perhaps we shall meet in Florence again."

"No, no. Whatever happens, that won't."

They shook hands and parted. Colville stood a moment, watching the slight bent figure of the old man as he moved briskly

up the Via de' Bardi, turning his head from side to side, to look at the palaces as he passed, and so losing himself in the dim, cavernous curve of the street. As soon as he was out of sight, Colville had an impulse to hurry after him and rejoin him; then he felt like turning about and going back to his hotel.

But he shook himself together into the shape of resolution, however slight and transient. "I must do *something* I intended to do," he said, between his set teeth, and pushed on up through the Via Guicciardini. "I will go to the Boboli because I *said* I would."

As he walked along, he seemed to himself to be merely crumbling away in this impulse and that, in one abortive intent and another. What did it all mean? Had he been his whole life one of these weak wills which are a curse to themselves and others, and most a curse when they mean the best? Was that the secret of his failure in life? But for many years he had seemed to succeed, to be as other men were, hard, practical men; he had once made a good newspaper, which was certainly not a dream of romance. Had he given that up at last because he was a weak will? And now was he running

away from Florence because his will was weak? He could look back to that squalid tragedy of his youth, and see that a more violent, a more determined man could have possessed himself of the girl whom he had lost. And now would it not be more manly, if more brutal, to stay here, where a hope, however fleeting, however fitful, of what might have been, had revisited him in the love of this young girl? He felt sure, if anything were sure, that something in him, in spite of their wide disparity of years, had captured her fancy, and now, in his abasement, he felt again the charm of his own power over her. They were no further apart in years than many a husband and wife; they would grow more and more together; there was youth enough in his heart yet; and who was pushing him away from her, forbidding him this treasure that he had but to put out his hand and make his own? Some one whom through all his thoughts of another he was trying to please, but whom he had made finally and inexorably his enemy. Better stay, then, something said to him; and when he answered, "I will," something else reminded him that this also was not willing but unwilling.

XIV.

WHEN he entered the beautiful old garden, its benison of peace fell upon his tumult, and he began to breathe a freer air, reverting to his purpose to be gone in the morning and resting in it, as he strolled up the broad curve of its alley from the gate. He had not been there since he walked there with one now more like a ghost to him than any of the dead who had since died. It was there that she had refused him; he recalled with a grim smile the awkwardness of getting back with her to the gate from the point, far within the garden, where he had spoken. Except that this had happened in the fall, and now it was early spring, there seemed no change since then; the long years that had elapsed were like a winter between.

He met people in groups and singly loitering through the paths, and chiefly speaking English; but no one spoke to him, and no one invaded the solitude in which he walked.

But the garden itself seemed to know him, and to give him a tacit recognition; the great, foolish grotto before the gate, with its statues by Bandinelli, and the fantastic effects of drapery and flesh in party-coloured statues lifted high on either side of the avenue; the vast shoulder of wall, covered thick with ivy and myrtle, which he passed on his way to the amphitheatre behind the palace; the alternate figures and urns on their pedestals in the hemicycle, as if the urns were placed there to receive the ashes of the figures when they became extinct; the white statues or the colossal busts set at the ends of the long alleys against black curtains of foliage; the big fountain, with its group in the centre of the little lake, and the meadow, quiet and sad, that stretched away on one side from this; the keen light under the levels of the dense pines and ilexes; the paths striking straight on either hand from the avenue through which he sauntered, and the walk that coiled itself through the depths of the plantations; all knew him, and from them and from the winter neglect which was upon the place distilled a subtle influence, a charm, an appeal belonging to that combination of artifice and nature which is perfect only in

an Italian garden under an Italian sky. He was right in the name which he mockingly gave the effect before he felt it; it was a debauch, delicate, refined, of unserious pensiveness, a smiling melancholy, in which he walked emancipated from his harassing hopes, and keeping only his shadowy regrets.

Colville did not care to scale the easy height from which you have the magnificent view, conscious of many photographs, of Florence. He wandered about the skirts of that silent meadow, and seeing himself unseen, he invaded its borders far enough to pluck one of those large scarlet anemones, such as he had given his gentle enemy. It was tilting there in the breeze above the unkempt grass, and the grass was beginning to feel the spring, and to stir and stretch itself after its winter sleep; it was sprinkled with violets, but these he did not molest. He came back to a stained and mossy stone bench on the avenue, fronting a pair of rustic youths carved in stone, who had not yet finished some game in which he remembered seeing them engaged when he was there before. He had not walked fast, but he had walked far, and was warm enough to like the whiffs of soft wind on his uncovered head. The spring was coming; that was its

breath, which you know unmistakably in Italy after all the kisses that winter gives. Some birds were singing in the trees; down an alley into which he could look, between the high walls of green, he could see two people in flirtation: he waited patiently till the young man should put his arm round the girl's waist, for the fleeting embrace from which she pushed it and fled further down the path.

"Yes, it's spring," thought Colville; and then, with the selfishness of the troubled soul, he wished that it might be winter still and indefinitely. It occurred to him now that he should not go back to Des Vaches, for he did not know what he should do there. He would go to New York; though he did not know what he should do in New York, either.

He became tired of looking at the people who passed, and of speculating about them through the second consciousness which enveloped the sad substance of his misgivings like an atmosphere; and he let his eyelids fall, as he leaned his head back against the tree behind his bench. Then their voices pursued him through the twilight that he had made himself, and forced him to the same weary conjecture as if he

had seen their faces. He heard gay laughter, and laughter that affected gaiety; the tones of young men in earnest disquisition reached him through the veil, and the talk, falling to whisper, of girls, with the names of men in it; sums of money, a hundred francs, forty thousand francs, came in high tones; a husband and wife went by quarrelling in the false security of English, and snapping at each other as confidingly as if in the sanctuary of home. The man bade the woman not be a fool, and she asked him how she was to endure his company if she was not a fool.

Colville opened his eyes to look after them, when a voice that he knew called out, "Why, it *is* Mr. Colville!"

It was Mrs. Amsden, and pausing with her, as if they had passed him in doubt, and arrested themselves when they had got a little way by, were Effie Bowen and Imogene Graham. The old lady had the child by the hand, and the girl stood a few paces apart from them. She was one of those beauties who have the property of looking very plain at times, and Colville, who had seen her in more than one transformation, now beheld her somehow clumsy of feature, and with the youth gone from her aspect.

She seemed a woman of thirty, and she wore an unbecoming walking dress of a fashion that contributed to this effect of age. Colville was aware afterward of having wished that she was really as old and plain as she looked.

He had to come forward, and put on the conventional delight of a gentleman meeting lady friends.

"It's remarkable how your having your eyes shut estranged you," said Mrs. Amsden. "Now, if you had let me see you oftener in church, where people close their eyes a good deal for one purpose or another, I should have known you at once."

"I hope you haven't lost a great deal of time, as it is, Mrs. Amsden," said Colville. "Of course I should have had my eyes open if I had known you were going by."

"Oh, don't apologise!" cried the old thing, with ready enjoyment of his tone.

"I don't apologise for not being recognisable; I apologise for being visible," said Colville, with some shapeless impression that he ought to excuse his continued presence in Florence to Imogene, but keeping his eyes upon Mrs. Amsden, to whom what he said could not be intelligible. "I ought to be in Turin to-day."

"In Turin! Are you going away from Florence?"

"I 'm going home."

"Why, did *you* know that?" asked the old lady of Imogene, who slightly nodded, and then of Effie, who also assented. "Really, the silence of the Bowen family in regard to the affairs of others is extraordinary. There never was a family more eminently qualified to live in Florence. I dare say that if I saw a little more of them, I might hope to reach the years of discretion myself some day. *Why* are you going away? (You see I haven't reached them yet!) Are you tired of Florence already?"

"No," said Colville passively; "Florence is tired of me."

"You 're quite sure?"

"Yes; there 's no mistaking one of her sex on such a point."

Mrs. Amsden laughed. "Ah, a great many people mistake us, both ways. And you 're really going back to America. What in the world for?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Is America fonder of you than Florence?"

"She 's never told her love. I suspect it 's merely that she 's more used to me."

They were walking, without any volition of his, down the slope of the broad avenue to the fountain, where he had already been.

"Is your mother well?" he asked of the little girl. It seemed to him that he had better not speak to Imogene, who still kept that little distance from the rest, and get away as soon as he decently could.

"She has a headache," said Effie.

"Oh, I'm sorry," returned Colville.

"Yes, she deputed me to take her young people out for an airing," said Mrs. Amsden; "and Miss Graham decided us for the Boboli, where she hadn't been yet. I've done what I could to make the place attractive. But what is an old woman to do for a girl in a garden? We ought to have brought some other young people—some of the Inglehart boys. But we're respectable, we Americans abroad; we're decorous, above all things; and I don't know about meeting *you* here, Mr. Colville. It has a very bad appearance. Are you sure that you didn't know I was to go by here at exactly half-past four?"

"I was living from breath to breath in the expectation of seeing you. You must have noticed how eagerly I was looking out for you."

"Yes, and with a single red anemone in

your hand, so that I should know you without being obliged to put on my spectacles."

"You divine everything, Mrs. Amsden," he said, giving her the flower.

"I shall make my brags to Mrs. Bowen when I see her," said the old lady. "How far into the country did you walk for this?"

"As far as the meadow yonder."

They had got down to the sheet of water from which the sea-horses of the fountain sprang, and the old lady sank upon a bench near it. Colville held out his hand toward Effie. "I saw a lot of violets over there in the grass."

"Did you?" She put her hand eagerly into his, and they strolled off together. After a first motion to accompany them, Imogene sat down beside Mrs. Amsden, answering quietly the talk of the old lady, and seeming in nowise concerned about the expedition for violets. Except for a dull first glance, she did not look that way. Colville stood in the border of the grass, and the child ran quickly hither and thither in it, stooping from time to time upon the flowers. Then she came out to where he stood, and showed her bunch of violets, looking up into the face which he bent upon

her, while he trifled with his cane. He had a very fatherly air with her.

"I think I'll go and see what they've found," said Imogene irrelevantly, to a remark of Mrs. Amsden's about the expensiveness of Madame Bossi's bonnets.

"Well," said the old lady. Imogene started, and the little girl ran to meet her. She detained Effie with her admiration of the violets till Colville lounged reluctantly up. "Go and show them to Mrs. Amsden," she said, giving back the violets, which she had been smelling. The child ran on. "Mr. Colville, I want to speak with you."

"Yes," said Colville helplessly.

"Why are you going away?"

"Why? Oh, I've accomplished the objects—or no-objects—I came for," he said, with dreary triviality, "and I must hurry away to other fields of activity." He kept his eyes on her face, which he saw full of a passionate intensity, working to some sort of overflow.

"That is not true, and you needn't say it to spare me. You are going away because Mrs. Bowen said something to you about me."

"Not quite that," returned Colville gently.

"No; it was something that she said to me about you. But it 's the same thing. It makes no difference. I ask you not to go for that."

"Do you know what you are saying, Imogene?"

"Yes."

Colville waited a long moment. "Then, I thank you, you dear girl, and I am going to-morrow, all the same. But I sha'n't forget this; whatever my life is to be, this will make it less unworthy and less unhappy. If it could buy anything to give you joy, to add some little grace to the good that must come to you, I would give it. Some day you 'll meet the young fellow whom you 're to make immortal, and you must tell him of an old fellow who knew you afar off, and understood how to worship you for an angel of pity and unselfishness. Ah, I hope he 'll understand, too! Good-bye." If he was to fly, that was the sole instant. He took her hand, and said again, "Good-bye." And then he suddenly cried, "Imogene, do you wish me to stay?"

"Yes!" said the girl, pouring all the intensity of her face into that whisper.

"Even if there had been nothing said to

make me go away—should you still wish me to stay?"

"Yes."

He looked her in the starry, lucid eyes, where a divine fervour deepened. He sighed in nerveless perplexity; it was she who had the courage.

"It's a mistake! You mustn't! I am too old for you! It would be a wrong and a cruelty! Yes, you must let me go, and forget me. I have been to blame. If Mrs. Bowen has blamed me, she was right—I deserved it; I deserved all she could say against me."

"She never said anything against you. Do you think I would have let her? No; it was I that said it, and I blamed you. It was because I thought that you were—you were——"

"Trifling with you? How could you think that?"

"Yes, I know now how it was, and it makes you seem all the grander to me. Did you think I cared for your being older than I was? I never cared for it—I never hardly thought of it after the very first. I tried to make you understand that, and how it hurt me to have you speak of it. Don't you think that I could see how good you were? Do

you suppose that all I want is to be happy? I don't care for that—I despise it, and I always hate myself for seeking my own pleasure, if I find myself doing it. I have seen enough of life to know what *that* comes to! And what hurt me worst of all was that you seemed to believe that I cared for nothing but amusing myself, when I wished to be something better, higher! It's nothing whether you are of my age or not, if—if—you care for me."

"Imogene!"

"All that I ask is to be with you, and try to make you forget what's been sad in your life, and try to be of use to you in whatever you are doing, and I shall be prouder and gladder of that than anything that people *call* happiness."

Colville stood holding her hand, while she uttered these ideas and incoherent repetitions of them, with a deep sense of powerlessness. "If I believed that I could keep you from regretting this——"

"What should I regret? I won't let you depreciate yourself—make yourself out not good enough for the best. Oh, I know how it happened! But now you shall never think of it again. No; I will not let you. That is the only way you could make me regret anything."

"I am going to stay," said Colville. "But on my own terms. I will be bound to you, but you shall not be bound to me."

"You doubt me! I would rather have you go! No; stay. And let me prove to you how wrong you are. I mustn't ask more than that. Only give me the chance to show you how different I am from what you think—how different you are, too."

"Yes. But you must be free."

"Well."

"What are they doing so long there?" asked Mrs. Amsden of Effie, putting her glasses to her eyes. "I can't see."

"They are just holding hands," said the child, with an easy satisfaction in the explanation, which perhaps the old lady did not share. "He always holds my hand when he is with me."

"Does he, indeed?" exclaimed Mrs. Amsden, with a cackle. She added, "That 's very polite of him, isn't it? You must be a great favourite with Mr. Colville. You will miss him when he 's gone."

"Yes. He 's very nice."

Colville and Imogene returned, coming slowly across the loose, neglected grass toward the old woman 's seat. She rose as they came up.

"You don't seem to have succeeded so well in getting flowers for Miss Graham as for the other ladies. But perhaps you didn't find her favourite over there. What is your favourite flower, Miss Graham? Don't say you have none! I didn't know that I preferred scarlet anemones. Were there no forget-me-nots over there in the grass?"

"There was no occasion for them," answered Colville.

"You always did make such pretty speeches!" said the old lady. "And they have such an orphic character, too; you can interpret them in so many different ways. Should you mind saying just what you meant by that one?"

"Yes, very much," replied Colville.

The old lady laughed with cheerful resignation. She would as lief report that reply of his as another. Even more than a man whom she could entangle in his speech she liked a man who could slip through the toils with unfailing ease. Her talk with such a man was the last consolation which remained to her from a life of harmless coquetries.

"I will refer it to Mrs. Bowen," she said. "She is a very wise woman, and she used to know you a great while ago."

"If you like, I will do it for you, Mrs. Amsden. I'm going to see her."

"To renew your adieux? Well, why not? Parting is such sweet sorrow! And if I were a young man I would go to say good-bye to Mrs. Bowen as often as she would let me. Now tell me honestly, Mr. Colville, did you ever see such an exquisite, perfect *creature?*"

"Oh, that's asking a good deal."

"What?"

"To tell you a thing honestly. How did you come here, Mrs. Amsden?"

"In Mrs. Bowen's carriage. I sent it round from the Pitti entrance to the Porta Romana. It's waiting there now, I suppose."

"I thought you had been corrupted, somehow. Your zeal is carriage-bought. It *is* a delightful vehicle. Do you think you could give me a lift home in it?"

"Yes, indeed. I've always a seat for you in my carriage. To Hotel d'Atene?"

"No, to Palazzo Pinti."

"This is deliciously mysterious," said Mrs. Amsden, drawing her shawl up about her shoulders, which, if no longer rounded, had still a charming droop. One realises in looking at such old ladies that there are women

who could manage their own skeletons winningly. She put up her glasses, which were an old-fashioned sort, held to the nose by a handle, and perused the different persons of the group. "Mr. Colville concealing an inward trepidation under a bold front; Miss Graham agitated but firm; the child as much puzzled as the old woman. I feel that we are a very interesting group—almost dramatic."

"Oh, call us a passage from a modern novel," suggested Colville, "if you 're in the romantic mood. One of Mr. James's."

"Don't you think we ought to be rather more of the great world for that? I hardly feel up to Mr. James. I should have said Howells. Only nothing happens in that case?"

"Oh, very well; that 's the most comfortable way. If it 's only Howells, there 's no reason why I shouldn't go with Miss Graham to show her the view of Florence from the cypress grove up yonder."

"No; he 's very particular when he 's on Italian ground," said Mrs. Amsden, rising. "You must come another time with Miss Graham, and bring Mrs. Bowen. It 's quite time we were going home."

The light under the limbs of the trees had begun to grow more liquid. The currents of warm breeze streaming through the cooler body of the air had ceased to ruffle the lakelet round the fountain, and the naiads rode their sea-horses through a perfect calm. A damp, pierced with the fresh odour of the water and of the springing grass, descended upon them. The saunterers through the different paths and alleys were issuing upon the main avenues, and tending in gathering force toward the gate.

They found Mrs. Bowen's carriage there, and drove first to her house, beyond which Mrs. Amsden lived in a direct line. On the way Colville kept up with her the bantering talk that they always carried on together, and found in it a respite from the formless future pressing close upon him. He sat with Effie on the front seat, and he would not look at Imogene's face, which, nevertheless, was present to some inner vision. When the porter opened the iron gate below and rang Mrs. Bowen's bell, and Effie sprang up the stairs before them to give her mother the news of Mr. Colville's coming, the girl stole her hand into his.

"Shall you—tell her?"

"Of course. She must know without an instant's delay."

"Yes, yes; that is right. Oh!— Shall I go with you?"

"Yes; come!"

XV.

MRS. BOWEN came in to them, looking pale and pain-worn, as she did that evening when she would not let Colville go away with the other tea-taking callers to whom she had made her headache an excuse. The eyelids which she had always a little difficulty in lifting were heavy with suffering, and her pretty smile had an effect of very great remoteness. But there was no consciousness of anything unusual or unexpected in his presence expressed in her looks or manner. Colville had meant to take Imogene by the hand and confront Mrs. Bowen with an immediate declaration of what had happened; but he found this impossible, at least in the form of his intention; he took, instead, the hand of conventional welcome which she gave him, and he obeyed her in taking provisionally the seat to which she invited him. At the same time the order of his words was dispersed in that wonder,

whether she suspected anything, with which he listened to her placid talk about the weather; she said she had thought it was a chilly day outdoors; but her headaches always made her very sensitive.

"Yes," said Colville, "I supposed it was cold myself till I went out, for I woke with a tinge of rheumatism." He felt a strong desire to excuse, to justify what had happened, and he went on, with a painful sense of Imogene's eyes bent in bewildered deference upon him. "I started out for a walk with Mr. Waters, but I left him after we got across the Ponte Vecchio; he went up to look at the Michelangelo bastions, and I strolled over to the Boboli Gardens—where I found your young people."

He had certainly brought himself to the point, but he seemed actually further from it than at first, and he made a desperate plunge, trying at the same time to keep something of his habitual nonchalance. "But that doesn't account for my being here. Imogene accounts for that. She has allowed me to stay in Florence."

Mrs. Bowen could not turn paler than her headache had left her, and she now underwent no change of complexion. But her throat was not clear enough to say to the

end, "Allowed you to stay in——" The trouble in her throat arrested her again.

Colville became very red. He put out his hand and took Imogene's, and now his eyes and Mrs. Bowen's met in the kind of glance in which people intercept and turn each other aside before they have reached a resting-place in each other's souls. But at the girl's touch his courage revived—in some physical sort. "Yes, and if she will let me stay with her, we are not going to part again."

Mrs. Bowen did not answer at once, and in the hush Colville heard the breathing of all three.

"Of course," he said, "we wished you to know at once, and I came in with Imogene to tell you."

"What do you wish me," asked Mrs. Bowen, "to do?"

Colville forced a nervous laugh. "Really, I 'm so little used to this sort of affair that I don't know whether I have any wish. Imogene is here with you, and I suppose I supposed you would wish to do something."

"I will do whatever you think best."

"Thank you: that 's very kind of you." He fell into a silence, in which he was able only to wish that he knew what was

best, and from which he came to the surface with, "Imogene's family ought to know, of course."

"Yes; they put her in my charge. They will have to know. Shall I write to them?"

"Why, if you will."

"Oh, certainly."

"Thank you."

He had taken to stroking with his right hand the hand of Imogene which he held in his left, and now he looked round at her with a glance which it was a relief not to have her meet. "And till we can hear from them, I suppose you will let me come to see her?"

"You know you have always been welcome here."

"Thank you very much." It seemed as if there ought to be something else to say, but Colville could not think of anything except: "We wish to act in every way with your approval, Mrs. Bowen. And I know that you are very particular in some things" —the words, now that they were said, struck him as unfortunate, and even vulgar—"and I shouldn't wish to annoy you——"

"Oh, I understand. I think it will be— I have no doubt you will know how to

manage all that. It isn't as if you were both——"

"Young?" asked Colville. "No; one of us is quite old enough to be thoroughly up in the *convenances*. We are qualified, I 'm afraid, as far as that goes," he added bitterly, "to set all Florence an example of correct behaviour."

He knew there must be pain in the face which he would not look at; he kept looking at Mrs. Bowen's face, in which certainly there was not much pleasure, either.

There was another silence, which became very oppressive before it ended in a question from Mrs. Bowen, who stirred slightly in her chair, and bent forward as if about to rise in asking it. "Shall you wish to consider it an engagement?"

Colville felt Imogene's hand tremble in his, but he received no definite prompting from the tremor. "I don't believe I know what you mean."

"I mean, till you have heard from Imogene's mother."

"I hadn't thought of that. Perhaps under the circumstances——" The tremor died out of the hand he held; it lay lax between his. "What do you say, Imogene?"

"I can't say anything. Whatever you think will be right—for me."

"I wish to do what will seem right and fair to your mother."

"Yes."

Colville heaved a hopeless sigh. Then with a deep inward humiliation, he said, "Perhaps if you know Imogene's mother, Mrs. Bowen, you can suggest—advise—— You——"

"You must excuse me; I can't suggest or advise anything. I must leave you perfectly free." She rose from her chair, and they both rose too from the sofa on which he had seated himself at Imogene's side. "I shall have to leave you, I'm afraid; my head aches still a little. Imogene!" She advanced toward the girl, who stood passively letting her come the whole distance. As if sensible of the rebuff expressed in this attitude, she halted a very little. Then she added, "I hope you will be very happy," and suddenly cast her arms round the girl, and stood long pressing her face into her neck. When she released her, Colville trembled lest she should be going to give him her hand in congratulation. But she only bowed slightly to him, with a sidelong, aversive glance, and walked out of the room

with a slow, rigid pace, like one that controls a tendency to giddiness.

Imogene threw herself on Colville's breast. It gave him a shock, as if he were letting her do herself some wrong. But she gripped him fast, and began to sob and to cry. "Oh! oh! oh!"

"What is it?—what is it, my poor girl?" he murmured. "Are you unhappy? Are you sorry? Let it all end, then!"

"No, no; it isn't that! But I am very unhappy—yes, very, very unhappy! Oh, I didn't suppose I should ever feel so toward any one. I hate her!"

"You hate her?" gasped Colville.

"Yes, I hate her. And she—she is so good to me! It must be that I've done her some deadly wrong, without knowing it, or I couldn't hate her as I know I do."

"Oh no," said Colville soothingly; "that's just your fancy. You haven't harmed her, and you don't hate her."

"Yes, yes, I do! You can't understand how I feel toward her."

"But you can't feel so toward her long," he urged, dealing as he might with what was wholly a mystery to him. "She is so good——"

"It only makes my badness worse, and makes me hate her more."

"I don't understand. But you are excited now. When you 're calmer you 'll feel differently, of course. I 've kept you restless and nervous a long time, poor child; but now our peace begins, and everything will be bright and——" He stopped: the words had such a very hollow sound.

She pushed herself from him and dried her eyes. "Oh yes."

"And, Imogene — perhaps—perhaps—— Or, no; never mind, now. I must go away——" She looked at him, frightened but submissive. "But I will be back to-night, or perhaps to-morrow morning. I want to think—to give you time to think. I don't want to be selfish about you—I want to consider you, all the more because you won't consider yourself. Good-bye." He stooped over and kissed her hair. Even in this he felt like a thief; he could not look at the face she lifted to his.

Mrs. Bowen sent word from her room that she was not coming to dinner, and Imogene did not come till the dessert was put on. Then she found Effie Bowen sitting alone at the table, and served in serious formality by the man, whom she had apparently felt it right to repress, for they were both silent. The little girl had not known how to deny

herself an excess of the less wholesome dishes, and she was perhaps anticipating the regret which this indulgence was to bring, for she was very pensive.

"Isn't mamma coming at *all?*" she asked plaintively, when Imogene sat down, and refused everything but a cup of coffee. "Well," she went on, "I can't make out what is coming to this family. You were all crying last night because Mr. Colville was going away, and now, when he 's going to stay, it 's just as bad. I don't think you make it very pleasant for *him*. I should think he would be perfectly puzzled by it, after he 's done so much to please you all. I don't believe he thinks it 's very polite. I suppose it *is* polite, but it doesn't seem so. And he 's always so cheerful and nice. I should think he would want to visit in some family where there was more amusement. There used to be plenty in this family, but now it 's as dismal! The first of the winter you and mamma used to be so pleasant when he came, and would try everything to amuse him, and would let me come in to get some of the good of it; but now you seem to fly every way as soon as he comes in sight of the house, and I 'm poked off in holes and corners before he can open his lips. And

I've borne it about as long as I can. I would rather be back in Vevay. Or anywhere." At this point her own pathos overwhelmed her, and the tears rolling down her cheeks moistened the crumbs of pastry at the corners of her pretty mouth. "What was so strange, I should like to know, about his staying, that mamma should pop up like a ghost, when I told her he had come home with us, and grab me by the wrist, and twitch me about, and ask me all sorts of questions I couldn't answer, and frighten me almost to death? I haven't got over it yet. And I don't think it's very nice. It used to be a very polite family, and pleasant with each other, and always having something agreeable going on in it; but if it keeps on *very* much longer in this way, I shall think the Bowens are beginning to lose their good-breeding. I suppose that if Mr. Colville were to go down on his knees to mamma and ask her to let him take me somewhere now, she wouldn't do it." She pulled her handkerchief out of her pocket, and dried her eyes on a ball of it. "I don't see what *you've* been crying about, Imogene. *You've* got nothing to worry you."

"I'm not very well, Effie," returned the girl gently. "I haven't been well all day."

"It seems to me that nobody is well any more. I don't believe Florence is a very healthy place. Or at least this house isn't. *I* think it must be the drainage. If we keep on, I suppose we shall all have diphtheria. Don't you, Imogene?"

"Yes," asserted the girl distractedly.

"The girls had it at Vevay frightfully. And none of them were as strong afterward. Some of the parents came and took them away; but Madame Schebres never let mamma know. Do you think that was right?"

"No; it was very wrong."

"I suppose Mr. Colville will have it if we do. That is, if he keeps coming here. Is he coming any more?"

"Yes; he's coming to-morrow morning."

"*Is* he?" A smile flickered over the rueful face. "What time is he coming?"

"I don't know exactly," said Imogene, listlessly stirring her coffee. "Some time in the forenoon."

"Do you suppose he's going to take us anywhere?"

"Yes—I think so. I can't tell exactly."

"If he asks me to go somewhere, will you tease mamma? She always lets you, Imo-

gene, and it seems sometimes as if she just took a pleasure in denying me."

"You mustn't talk so of your mother, Effie."

"No; I wouldn't to *every*body. I know that she means for the best; but I don't believe she understands how much I suffer when she won't let me go with Mr. Colville. Don't you think he's about the nicest gentleman we know, Imogene?"

"Yes; he's very kind."

"And I think he's handsome. A good many people would consider him old-looking, and of course he isn't so young as Mr. Morton was, or the Inglehart boys; but that makes him all the easier to get along with. And his being just a little fat, that way, seems to suit so well with his character." The smiles were now playing across the child's face, and her eyes sparkling. "*I* think Mr. Colville would make a good Saint Nicholas—the kind they have going down chimneys in America. I'm going to tell him, for the next veglione. It would be such a nice surprise."

"No, better not tell him that," suggested Imogene.

"Do you think he wouldn't like it?"

"Yes."

"Well, it would become him. How old do you suppose he is, Imogene? Seventy-five?"

"What an idea!" cried the girl fiercely. "He's forty-one."

"I didn't know they had those little jiggering lines at the corners of their eyes so quick. But forty-one is pretty old, isn't it? Is Mr. Waters——"

"Effie," said her mother's voice at the door behind her, "will you ring for Giovanni, and tell him to bring me a cup of coffee in here?" She spoke from the *portière* of the *salotto*.

"Yes, mamma. I'll bring it to you myself."

"Thank you, dear," Mrs. Bowen called from within.

The little girl softly pressed her hands together. "I *hope* she'll let me stay up! I feel so excited, and I hate to lie and think so long before I get to sleep. Couldn't you just hint a little to her that I might stay up? It's Sunday night."

"I can't, Effie," said Imogene. "I oughtn't to interfere with any of your mother's rules."

The child sighed submissively and took the coffee that Giovanni brought to her. She and Imogene went into the *salotto* together.

Mrs. Bowen was at her writing-desk. "You can bring the coffee here, Effie," she said.

"Must I go to bed at once, mamma?" asked the child, setting the cup carefully down.

The mother looked distractedly up from her writing. "No; you may sit up a while," she said, looking back to her writing.

"How long, mamma?" pleaded the little girl.

"Oh, till you're sleepy. It doesn't matter *now*." She went on writing; from time to time she tore up what she had written.

Effie softly took a book from the table, and perching herself on a stiff, high chair, bent over it and began to read.

Imogene sat by the hearth, where a small fire was pleasant in the indoor chill of an Italian house, even after so warm a day as that had been. She took some large beads of the strand she wore about her neck into her mouth, and pulled at the strand listlessly with her hand while she watched the fire. Her eyes wandered once to the child.

"What made you take such an uncomfortable chair, Effie?"

Effie shut her book over her hand. "It

keeps me wakeful longer," she whispered, with a glance at her mother from the corner of her eye.

"I don't see why any one should wish to be wakeful," sighed the girl.

When Mrs. Bowen tore up one of her half-written pages Imogene started nervously forward, and then relapsed again into her chair. At last Mrs. Bowen seemed to find the right phrases throughout, and she finished rather a long letter, and read it over to herself. Then she said without leaving her desk, "Imogene, I've been trying to write to your mother. Will you look at this?"

She held the sheet over her shoulder, and Imogene came languidly and took it; Mrs. Bowen dropped her face forward on the desk, into her hands, while Imogene was reading.

"FLORENCE, *March* 10, 18—.

"DEAR MRS. GRAHAM,—I have some very important news to give you in regard to Imogene, and as there is no way of preparing you for it, I will tell you at once that it relates to her marriage.

"She has met at my house a gentleman whom I knew in Florence when I was here before, and of whom I never knew anything but good. We have seen him very often, and I have seen

nothing in him that I could not approve. He is Mr. Theodore Colville, of Prairie des Vaches, Indiana, where he was for many years a newspaper editor; but he was born somewhere in New England. He is a very cultivated, interesting man; and though not exactly a society man, he is very agreeable and refined in his manners. I am sure his character is irreproachable, though he is not a member of any church. In regard to his means I know nothing whatever, and can only infer from his way of life that he is in easy circumstances.

"The whole matter has been a surprise to me, for Mr. Colville is some twenty-one or two years older than Imogene, who is very young in her feelings for a girl of her age. If I could have realised anything like a serious attachment between them sooner, I would have written before. Even now I do not know whether I am to consider them engaged or not. No doubt Imogene will write you more fully.

"Of course I would rather not have had anything of the kind happen while Imogene was under my charge, though I am sure that you will not think I have been careless or imprudent about her. I interfered as far as I could, at the first moment I could, but it appears that it was then too late to prevent what has followed.—Yours sincerely, EVALINA BOWEN."

Imogene read the letter twice over, and

then she said, "Why isn't he a society man?"

Probably Mrs. Bowen expected this sort of approach. "I don't think a society man would have undertaken to dance the Lancers as he did at Madame Uccelli's," she answered patiently, without lifting her head.

Imogene winced, but "I should despise him if he were merely a society man," she said. "I have seen enough of them. I think it's better to be intellectual and good."

Mrs. Bowen made no reply, and the girl went on. "And as to his being older, I don't see what difference it makes. If people are in sympathy, then they are of the same age, no difference how much older than one the other is. I have always heard that." She urged this as if it were a question.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bowen.

"And how should his having been a newspaper editor be anything against him?"

Mrs. Bowen lifted her face and stared at the girl in astonishment. "Who said it was against him?"

"You hint as much. The whole letter is against him."

"Imogene!"

"Yes! Every word! You make him out perfectly detestable. I don't know why you should hate *him*. He 's done everything he could to satisfy you."

Mrs. Bowen rose from her desk, putting her hand to her forehead, as if to soften a shock of headache that her change of posture had sent there. "I will leave the letter with you, and you can send it or not as you think best. It 's merely a formality, my writing to your mother. Perhaps you 'll see it differently in the morning. Effie!" she called to the child, who with her book shut upon her hand had been staring at them and listening intently. "It 's time to go to bed now."

When Effie stood before the glass in her mother's room, and Mrs. Bowen was braiding her hair and tying it up for the night, she asked ruefully, "What 's the matter with Imogene, mamma?"

"She isn't very happy to-night."

"*You* don't seem very happy either," said the child, watching her own face as it quivered in the mirror. "I should think that now Mr. Colville's concluded to stay, we would all be happy again. But we don't seem to. We 're—we 're perfectly demoral-

ised!" It was one of the words she had picked up from Colville.

The quivering face in the glass broke in a passion of tears, and Effie sobbed herself to sleep.

Imogene sat down at Mrs. Bowen's desk, and pushing her letter away, began to write.

"FLORENCE, *March* 10, 18—.

"DEAR MOTHER,—I enclose a letter from Mrs. Bowen which will tell you better than I can what I wish to tell. I do not see how I can add anything that would give you more of an idea of him, or less, either. No person can be put down in cold black and white, and not seem like a mere inventory. I do not suppose you expected me to become engaged when you sent me out to Florence, and, as Mrs. Bowen says, I don't know whether I am engaged or not. I will leave it entirely to Mr. Colville; if he says we are engaged, we are. I am sure he will do what is best. I only know that he was going away from Florence because he thought I supposed he was not in earnest, and I asked him to stay.

"I am a good deal excited to-night, and cannot write very clearly. But I will write soon again, and more at length.

"Perhaps something will be decided by that time. With much love to father,

"Your affectionate daughter,

"IMOGENE."

She put this letter into an envelope with Mrs. Bowen's, and leaving it unsealed to show her in the morning, she began to write again. This time she wrote to a girl with whom she had been on terms so intimate that when they left school they had agreed to know each other by names expressive of their extremely confidential friendship, and to address each other respectively as Diary and Journal. They were going to write every day, if only a line or two; and at the end of a year they were to meet and read over together the records of their lives as set down in these letters. They had never met since, though it was now three years since they parted, and they had not written since Imogene came abroad; that is, Imogene had not answered the only letter she had received from her friend in Florence. This friend was a very serious girl, and had wished to be a minister, but her family would not consent, or even accept the compromise of studying medicine, which she proposed, and she was still living at home in a small city of central New York. Imogene now addressed her—

"DEAR DIARY,—You cannot think how far away the events of this day have pushed the

feelings and ideas of the time when I agreed to write to you under this name. Till now it seems to me as if I had not changed in the least thing since we parted, and now I can hardly know myself for the same person. O dear Di! something very wonderful has come into my life, and I feel that it rests with me to make it the greatest blessing to myself and others, or the greatest misery. If I prove unworthy of it or unequal to it, then I am sure that nothing but wretchedness will come of it.

"I am engaged — yes!—and to a man more than twice my own age. It is so easy to tell *you* this, for I know that your large-mindedness will receive it very differently from most people, and that you will see it as I do. He is the noblest of men, though he tries to conceal it under the light, ironical manner with which he has been faithful to a cruel disappointment. It was here in Florence, twenty years ago, that a girl—I am ashamed to call her a girl—trifled with the priceless treasure that has fallen to me, and flung it away. *You*, Di, will understand how I was first fascinated with the idea of trying to atone to him here for all the wrong he had suffered. At first it was only the vaguest suggestion—something like what I had read in a poem or a novel—that had nothing to do with me personally, but it grew upon me more and more the more I saw of him, and felt the witchery of his light, indifferent manner, which

I learned to see was tense with the anguish he had suffered. She had killed his youth; she had spoiled his life: if I could revive them, restore them! It came upon me like a great flash of light at last, and as soon as this thought took possession of me, I felt my whole being elevated and purified by it, and I was enabled to put aside with contempt the selfish considerations that had occurred to me at first. At first the difference between our ages was very shocking to me; for I had always imagined it would be some one young; but when this light broke upon me, I saw that *he* was young, younger even than I, as a man is at the same age with a girl. Sometimes with my experiences, the fancies and flirtations that every one has and *must* have, however one despises them, I felt so *old* beside him; for he had been true to one love all his life, and he had not wavered for a moment. If I could make him forget it, if I could lift every feather's weight of sorrow from his breast, if I could help him to complete the destiny, grand and beautiful as it would have been, which another had arrested, broken off—don't you see, Di dear, how rich my reward would be?

"And he, how forbearing, how considerate, how anxious for me, how full of generous warning he has been! always putting me in mind, at every step, of the difference in years between us; never thinking of himself, and shrinking so much from even seeming to control me or sway me,

that I don't know really whether I have not made all the advances !

"I cannot write his name yet, and you must not ask it till I can ; and I cannot tell you anything about his looks or his life without seeming to degrade him, somehow, and make him a common man like others.

"How can I make myself his companion in everything ? How can I convince him that there is no sacrifice for me, and that he alone is giving up ? These are the thoughts that keep whirling through my mind. I hope I shall be helped, and I hope that I shall be tried, for that is the only way for me to be helped. I feel strong enough for anything that people can say. I should *welcome* criticism and opposition from any quarter. But I can see that *he* is very sensitive—it comes from his keen sense of the ridiculous—and if I suffer, it will be on account of this grand unselfish nature, and I shall be glad of that.

"I know you will understand me, Di, and I am not afraid of your laughing at these ravings. But if you did I should not care. It is such a comfort to say these things about him, to exalt him, and get him in the true light at last.

"Your faithful JOURNAL.

"I shall tell him about you, one of the first things, and perhaps he can suggest some way out of your trouble, he has had so much experi-

ence of every kind. You will worship him, as I do, when you see him; for you will feel at once that he understands you, and that is such a *rest*.

"J."

Before Imogene fell asleep, Mrs. Bowen came to her in the dark, and softly closed the door that opened from the girl's room into Effie's. She sat down on the bed, and began to speak at once, as if she knew Imogene must be awake. "I thought you would come to *me*, Imogene; but as you didn't, I have come to you, for if you can go to sleep with hard thoughts of me to-night, I can't let you. You need me for your friend, and I wish to be your friend; it would be wicked in me to be anything else; I would give the world if your mother were here; but I tried to make my letter to her everything that it should be. If you don't think it is, I will write it over in the morning."

"No," said the girl coldly; "it will do very well. I don't wish to trouble you so much."

"Oh, how can you speak so to me? Do you think that I blame Mr. Colville? Is that it? I don't ask you—I shall never ask you—how he came to remain, but I know

that he has acted truthfully, and delicately. I knew him long before you did, and no one need take his part with me." This was not perhaps what Mrs. Bowen meant to say when she began. "I have told you all along what I thought, but if you imagine that I am not satisfied with Mr. Colville, you are very much mistaken. I can't burst out into praises of him to your mother: that would be very patronising and very bad taste. Can't you see that it would?"

"Oh yes."

Mrs. Bowen lingered, as if she expected Imogene to say something more, but she did not, and Mrs. Bowen rose. "Then I hope we understand each other," she said, and went out of the room.

XVI.

WHEN Colville came in the morning, Mrs. Bowen received him. They shook hands, and their eyes met in the intercepting glance of the night before.

"Imogene will be here in a moment," she said, with a naturalness that made him awkward and conscious.

"Oh, there is no haste," he answered uncouthly. "That is, I am very glad of the chance to speak a moment with you, and to ask your—to profit by what you think best. I know you are not very well pleased with me, and I don't know that I can ever put myself in a better light with you—the true light. It seems that there are some things we must not do even for the truth's sake. But that 's neither here nor there. What I am most anxious for is not to take a shadow of advantage of this child's—of Imogene's inexperience, and her remoteness from her family. I feel that I must in some sort protect her

from herself. Yes—that is my idea. But I have to do this in so many ways that I hardly know how to begin. I should be very willing, if you thought best, to go away and stay away till she has heard from her people, and let her have that time to think it all over again. She is very young—so much younger than I! Or, if you thought it better, I would stay, and let her remain free while I held myself bound to any decision of hers. I am anxious to do what is right. At the same time"—he smiled ruefully—"there is such a thing as being so *dis*interested that one may seem *un*interested. I may leave her so very free that she may begin to suspect that I want a little freedom myself. What shall I do? I wish to act with your approval."

Mrs. Bowen had listened with acquiescence and intelligence that might well have looked like sympathy, as she sat fingering the top of her hand-screen, with her eyelids fallen. She lifted them to say, "I have told you that I will not advise you in any way. I cannot. I have no longer any wish in this matter. I must still remain in the place of Imogene's mother; but I will do only what you wish. Please understand that, and don't ask me for advice any more. It is painful."

She drew her lower lip in a little, and let the screen fall into her lap.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Bowen, to do anything —say anything—that is painful to you," Colville began. "You know that I would give the world to please you——" The words escaped him and left him staring at her.

"What are you saying to me, Theodore Colville?" she exclaimed, flashing a full-eyed glance upon him, and then breaking into a laugh, as unnatural for her. "Really, I don't believe you know!"

"Heaven knows I meant nothing but what I said," he answered, struggling stupidly with a confusion of desires which every man but no woman will understand. After eighteen hundred years, the man is still imperfectly monogamous. "Is there anything wrong in it?"

"Oh no! Not for you," she said scornfully.

"I am very much in earnest," he went on hopelessly, "in asking your opinion, your help, in regard to how I shall treat this affair."

"And I am still more in earnest in telling you that I will give you no opinion, no help. I forbid you to recur to the subject." He was silent, unable to drop his eyes from

hers. "But for her," continued Mrs. Bowen, "I will do anything in my power. If she asks my advice I will give it, and I will give her all the help I can."

"Thank you," said Colville vaguely.

"I will not have your thanks," promptly retorted Mrs. Bowen, "for I mean you no kindness. I am trying to do my duty to Imogene, and when that is ended, all is ended. There is no way now for you to please me—as you call it—except to keep her from regretting what she has done."

"Do you think I shall fail in that?" he demanded indignantly.

"I can offer you no opinion. I can't tell what you will do."

"There are two ways of keeping her from regretting what she has done; and perhaps the simplest and best way would be to free her from the consequences, as far as they 're involved in me," said Colville.

Mrs. Bowen dropped herself back in her arm-chair. "If you choose to force these things upon me, I am a woman, and can't help myself. Especially, I can't help myself against a guest."

"Oh, I will relieve you of my presence," said Colville. "I 've no wish to force any-

thing upon you—least of all myself." He rose, and moved toward the door.

She hastily intercepted him. "Do you think I will let you go without seeing Imogene? Do you understand me so little as that? It's *too late* for you to go! You know what I think of all this, and I know, better than you, what you think. I shall play my part, and you shall play yours. I have refused to give you advice or help, and I never shall do it. But I know what my duty to her is, and I will fulfil it. No matter how distasteful it is to either of us, you must come here as before. The house is as free to you as ever—freer. And we are to be as good friends as ever—better. You can see Imogene alone or in my presence, and, as far as I am concerned, you shall consider yourself engaged or not, as you choose. Do you understand?"

"Not in the least," said Colville, in the ghost of his old bantering manner. "But don't explain, or I shall make still less of it."

"I mean simply that I do it for Imogene and not for you."

"Oh, I understand that you don't do it for me."

At this moment Imogene appeared between the folds of the *portière*, and her

timid, embarrassed glance from Mrs. Bowen to Colville was the first gleam of consolation that had visited him since he parted with her the night before. A thrill of inexplicable pride and fondness passed through his heart, and even the compunction that followed could not spoil its sweetness. But if Mrs. Bowen discreetly turned her head aside that she need not witness a tender greeting between them, the precaution was unnecessary. He merely went forward and took the girl's hand, with a sigh of relief. "Good morning, Imogene," he said, with a kind of compassionate admiration.

"Good morning," she returned half-inquiringly.

She did not take a seat near him, and turned, as if for instruction, to Mrs. Bowen. It was probably the force of habit. In any case, Mrs. Bowen's eyes gave no response. She bowed slightly to Colville, and began, "I must leave Imogene to entertain you for the present, Mr.——"

"No!" cried the girl impetuously; "don't go." Mrs. Bowen stopped. "I wish to speak with you—with you and Mr. Colville together. I wish to say—I don't know how to say it exactly; but I wish to know—— You asked him last night, Mrs. Bowen,

whether he wished to consider it an engagement?"

"I thought perhaps you would rather hear from your mother——"

"Yes, I would be glad to know that my mother approved; but if she didn't, I couldn't help it. Mr. Colville said he was bound, but I was not. That can't be. I *wish* to be bound, if he is."

"I don't quite know what you expect me to say."

"Nothing," said Imogene. "I merely wished you to know. And I don't wish you to sacrifice anything to us. If you think best, Mr. Colville will not see me till I hear from home; though it won't make any difference with me *what* I hear."

"There 's no reason why you shouldn't meet," said Mrs. Bowen absently.

"If you wish it to have the same appearance as an Italian engagement——"

"No," said Mrs. Bowen, putting her hand to her head with a gesture she had; "that would be quite unnecessary. It would be ridiculous under the circumstances. I have thought of it, and I have decided that the American way is the best."

"Very well, then," said Imogene, with the air of summing up; "then the only

question is whether we shall make it known or not to other people."

This point seemed to give Mrs. Bowen greater pause than any. She was a long time silent, and Colville saw that Imogene was beginning to chafe at her indecision. Yet he did not see the moment to intervene in a debate in which he found himself somewhat ludicrously ignored, as if the affair were solely the concern of these two women, and none of his.

"Of course, Mrs. Bowen," said the girl haughtily, "if it will be disagreeable to you to have it known——"

Mrs. Bowen blushed delicately—a blush of protest and of generous surprise, or so it seemed to Colville. "I was not thinking of myself, Imogene. I only wish to consider you. And I was thinking whether, at this distance from home, you wouldn't prefer to have your family's approval before you made it known."

"I am sure of their approval. Father will do what mother says, and she has always said that she would never interfere with me in—in—such a thing."

"Perhaps you would like all the more, then, to show her the deference of waiting for her consent."

Imogene started as if stopped short in swift career; it was not hard for Colville to perceive that she saw for the first time the reverse side of a magnanimous impulse. She suddenly turned to him.

"I think Mrs. Bowen is right," he said gravely, in answer to the eyes of Imogene. He continued, with a flicker of his wonted mood: "You must consider me a little in the matter. I have some small shreds of self-respect about me somewhere, and I would rather not be put in the attitude of defying your family, or ignoring them."

"No," said Imogene, in the same effect of arrest.

"When it isn't absolutely necessary," continued Colville. "Especially as you say there will be no opposition."

"Of course," Imogene assented; and in fact what he said was very just, and he knew it; but he could perceive that he had suffered loss with her. A furtive glance at Mrs. Bowen did not assure him that he had made a compensating gain in that direction, where, indeed, he had no right to wish for any.

"Well, then," the girl went on, "it shall be so. We will wait. It will only be waiting. I ought to have thought of you before;

I make a bad beginning," she said tremulously. "I supposed I *was* thinking of you; but I see that I was only thinking of myself." The tears stood in her eyes. Mrs. Bowen, quite overlooked in this apology, slipped from the room.

"Imogene!" said Colville, coming toward her.

She dropped herself upon his shoulder. "Oh, why, why, *why* am I so miserable?"

"Miserable, Imogene!" he murmured, stroking her beautiful hair.

"Yes, yes! Utterly miserable! It must be because I'm unworthy of you—unequal every way. If you think so, cast me off at once. Don't be weakly merciful!"

The words pierced his heart. "I would give the world to make you happy, my child!" he said, with perfidious truth, and a sigh that came from the bottom of his soul. "Sit down here by me," he said, moving to the sofa; and with whatever obscure sense of duty to her innocent self-*abandon*, he made a space between them, and reduced her embrace to a clasp of the hand she left with him. "Now tell me," he said, "what is it makes you unhappy?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered, drying her averted eyes. "I suppose I am

overwrought from not sleeping, and from thinking how we should arrange it all."

"And now that it's all arranged, can't you be cheerful again?"

"Yes."

"You're satisfied with the way we've arranged it? Because if——"

"Oh, perfectly—perfectly!" she hastily interrupted. "I wouldn't have it otherwise. Of course," she added, "it wasn't very pleasant having some one else suggest what I ought to have thought of myself, and seem more delicate about you than I was."

"Some one else?"

"You know! Mrs. Bowen."

"Oh! But I couldn't see that she was anxious to spare me. It occurred to me that she was concerned about your family."

"It led up to the other! it's all the same thing."

"Well, even in that case, I don't see why you should mind it. It was certainly very friendly of her, and I know that she has your interest at heart entirely."

"Yes; she knows how to make it seem so."

Colville hesitated in bewilderment. "Imogene!" he cried at last, "I don't understand

this. Don't you think Mrs. Bowen likes you?"

"She detests me."

"Oh, no, no, no! That's too cruel an error. You mustn't think that. I can't let you. It's morbid. I'm sure that she's devotedly kind and good to you."

"Being kind and good isn't liking. I know what she thinks. But of course I can't expect to convince you of it; no one else could see it."

"No!" said Colville, with generous fervour. "Because it doesn't exist, and you mustn't imagine it. You are as sincerely and unselfishly regarded in this house as you could be in your own home. I'm sure of that. I know Mrs. Bowen. She has her little worldlinesses and unrealities of manner, but she is truth and loyalty itself. She would rather die than be false, or even unfair. I knew her long ago——"

"Yes," cried the girl, "long before you knew me!"

"And I know her to be the soul of honour," said Colville, ignoring the childish outburst. "Honour—like a man's," he added. "And, Imogene, I want you to promise me that you'll not think of her any more in that way. I want you to think of

her as faithful and loving to you, for she is so. Will you do it?"

Imogene did not answer him at once. Then she turned upon him a face of radiant self-abnegation. "I will do anything you tell me. Only tell me things to do."

The next time he came he again saw Mrs. Bowen alone before Imogene appeared. The conversation was confined to two sentences.

"Mr. Colville," she said, with perfectly tranquil point, while she tilted a shut book to and fro on her knee, "I will thank you not to defend me."

Had she overheard? Had Imogene told her? He answered, in a fury of resentment for her ingratitude that stupefied him. "I will never speak of you again."

Now they were enemies; he did not know how or why, but he said to himself, in the bitterness of his heart, that it was better so; and when Imogene appeared, and Mrs. Bowen vanished, as she did without another word to him, he folded the girl in a vindictive embrace.

"What is the matter?" she asked, pushing away from him.

"With me?"

"Yes; you seem so excited."

"Oh, nothing," he said, shrinking from the sharpness of that scrutiny in a woman's eyes, which, when it begins the perusal of a man's soul, astonishes and intimidates him; he never perhaps becomes able to endure it with perfect self-control. "I suppose a slight degree of excitement in meeting you may be forgiven me." He smiled under the unrelaxed severity of her gaze.

"Was Mrs. Bowen saying anything about me?"

"Not a word," said Colville, glad of getting back to the firm truth again, even if it were mere literality.

"We have made it up," she said, her scrutiny changing to a lovely appeal for his approval. "What there was to make up."

"Yes?"

"I told her what you had said. And now it 's all right between us, and you mustn't be troubled at that any more. I did it to please you."

She seemed to ask him with the last words whether she really had pleased him, as if something in his aspect suggested a doubt; and he hastened to reassure her. "That was very good of you. I appreciate it highly. It 's extremely gratifying."

She broke into a laugh of fond derision. "I don't believe you really cared about it, or else you're not thinking about it now. Sit down here; I want to tell you of something I've thought out." She pulled him to the sofa, and put his arm about her waist, with a simple fearlessness and matter-of-course promptness that made him shudder. He felt that he ought to tell her not to do it, but he did not quite know how without wounding her. She took hold of his hand and drew his lax arm taut. Then she looked up into his eyes, as if some sense of his misgiving had conveyed itself to her, but she did not release her hold of his hand.

"Perhaps we oughtn't, if we're not engaged?" she suggested, with such utter trust in him as made his heart quake.

"Oh," he sighed, from a complexity of feeling that no explanation could wholly declare, "we're engaged enough for that, I suppose."

"I'm glad you think so," she answered innocently. "I knew you wouldn't let me if it were not right." Having settled the question, "Of course," she continued, "we shall all do our best to keep our secret; but in spite of everything it may get out. Do you see?"

"Well?"

"Well, of course it will make a great deal of remark."

"Oh yes; you must be prepared for that, Imogene," said Colville, with as much gravity as he could make comport with his actual position.

"I am prepared for it, and prepared to despise it," answered the girl. "I shall have no trouble except the fear that you will mind it." She pressed his hand as if she expected him to say something to this.

"I shall never care for it," he said, and this was true enough. "My only care will be to keep you from regretting. I have tried from the first to make you see that I was very much older than you. It would be miserable enough if you came to see it too late."

"I have never seen it, and I never shall see it, because there's no such difference between us. It isn't the years that make us young or old—who is it says that? No matter, it's true. And I want you to believe it. I want you to feel that *I* am your youth—the youth you were robbed of—given back to you. Will you do it? Oh, if you could, I should be the happiest girl

in the world." Tears of fervour dimmed the beautiful eyes which looked into his. "Don't speak!" she hurried on. "I won't let you till I have said it all. It 's been this idea, this hope, with me always—ever since I knew what happened to you here long ago—that you might go back in my life and take up yours where it was broken off; that I might make your life what it would have been—complete your destiny——"

Colville wrenched himself loose from the hold that had been growing more tenderly close and clinging. "And do you think I could be such a vampire as to let you? Yes, yes; I have had my dreams of such a thing; but I see now how hideous they were. You shall make no such sacrifice to me. You must put away the fancies that could never be fulfilled, or if by some infernal magic they could, would only bring sorrow to you and shame to me. God forbid! And God forgive me, if I have done or said anything to put this in your head! And thank God it isn't too late yet for you to take yourself back."

"Oh," she murmured. "Do you think it is self-sacrifice for me to give myself to *you?* It 's self-glorification! You don't understand—I haven't told you what I

mean, or else I've told it in such a way that I've made it hateful to you. Do you think I don't care for you except to be something to you? I'm not so generous as that. You are all the world to me. If I take myself back from you, as you say, what shall I do with myself?"

"Has it come to that?" asked Colville. He sat down again with her, and this time he put his arm around her and drew her to him, but it seemed to him he did it as if she were his child. "I was going to tell you just now that each of us lived to himself in this world, and that no one could hope to enter into the life of another and complete it. But now I see that I was partly wrong. We two are bound together, Imogene, and whether we become all in all or nothing to each other, we can have no separate fate."

The girl's eyes kindled with rapture. "Then let us never speak of it again. I was going to say something, but now I won't say it."

"Yes, say it."

"No; it will make you think that I am anxious on my own account about appearances before people."

"You poor child, I shall never think you

are anxious on your own account about anything. What were you going to say?"

"Oh, nothing! It was only—are you invited to the Phillipses' fancy ball?"

"Yes," said Colville, silently making what he could of the diversion, "I believe so."

"And are you going—did you mean to go?" she asked timidly.

"Good heavens, no! What in the world should I do at another fancy ball? I walked about with the airy grace of a bull in a china-shop at the last one."

Imogene did not smile. She faintly sighed. "Well, then, I won't go either."

"Did you intend to go?"

"Oh no!"

"Why, of course you did, and it's very right you should. Did you want me to go?"

"It would bore you."

"Not if you're there." She gave his hand a grateful pressure. "Come, I'll go, of course, Imogene. A fancy ball to please you is a very different thing from a fancy ball in the abstract."

"Oh, what nice things you say! Do you know, I always admired your compliments? I think they're the most charming compliments in the world."

"I don't think they 're half so pretty as yours; but they 're more sincere."

"No, honestly. They flatter, and at the same time they make fun of the flattery a little; they make a person feel that you like them, even while you laugh at them."

"They appear to be rather an intricate kind of compliment—sort of *salsa agradolce* affair—tutti frutti style—species of moral mayonnaise."

"No—be quiet! You know what I mean. What were we talking about? Oh! I was going to say that the most fascinating thing about you always was that ironical way of yours."

"Have I an ironical way? You were going to tell me something more about the fancy ball."

"I don't care for it. I would rather talk about you."

"And I prefer the ball. It 's a fresher topic—to me."

"Very well, then. But this I *will* say. No matter how happy you should be, I should always want you to keep that tone of persiflage. You 've no idea how perfectly intoxicating it is."

"Oh yes, I have. It seems to have turned the loveliest and wisest head in the world."

"Oh, do you really think so? I would give anything if you did."

"What?"

"Think I was pretty," she pleaded, with full eyes. "Do you?"

"No, but I think you are wise. Fifty per cent. of truth—it's a large average in compliments. What are you going to wear?"

"Wear? Oh! At the ball! Something Egyptian, I suppose. It's to be an Egyptian ball. Didn't you understand that?"

"Oh yes. But I supposed you could go in any sort of dress."

"You can't. You must go in some Egyptian character."

"How would Moses do? In the bulrushes, you know. You could be Pharaoh's daughter, and recognise me by my three hats. And toward the end of the evening, when I became very much bored, I could go round killing Egyptians."

"No, no. Be serious. Though I like you to joke, too. I shall always want you to joke. Shall you, always?"

"There may be emergencies when I shall fail—like family prayers, and grace before meat, and dangerous sickness."

"Why, of course. But I mean when

we 're together, and there 's no reason why you shouldn't ?"

"Oh, at such times I shall certainly joke."

"And before people, too ! I won't have them saying that it 's sobered you—that you used to be very gay, and now you 're cross, and never say anything."

"I will try to keep it up sufficiently to meet the public demand."

"And I shall want you to joke *me, too.* You must satirise me. It does more to show me my faults than anything else, and it will show other people how perfectly submissive I am, and how I think everything you do is just right."

"If I were to beat you a little in company, don't you think it would serve the same purpose ?"

"No, no ; be serious."

"About joking ?"

"No, about me. I know that I 'm very intense, and you must try to correct that tendency in me."

"I will, with pleasure. Which of my tendencies are you going to correct ?"

"You have none."

"Well, then, neither have you. I 'm not going to be outdone in civilities."

"Oh, if people could only hear you talk in

this light way, and then know what *I* know!"

Colville broke out into a laugh at the deep sigh which accompanied these words. As a whole, the thing was grotesque and terrible to him, but after a habit of his, he was finding a strange pleasure in its details.

"No, no," she pleaded. "Don't laugh. There are girls that would give their eyes for it."

"As pretty eyes as yours?"

"Do you think they 're nice?"

"Yes, if they were not so mysterious."

"Mysterious?"

"Yes, I feel that your eyes can't really be as honest as they look. That was what puzzled me about them the first night I saw you."

"No—did it, really?"

"I went home saying to myself that no girl could be so sincere as that Miss Graham seemed."

"Did you say that?"

"Words to that effect."

"And what do you think now?"

"Ah, I don't know. You had better go as the Sphinx."

Imogene laughed in simple gaiety of heart. "How far we 've got from the ball!" she

said, as if the remote excursion were a triumph. "What shall we really go as?"

"Isis and Osiris."

"Weren't they gods of some kind?"

"Little one-horse deities — not very much."

"It won't do to go as gods of any kind. They 're always failures. People expect too much of them."

"Yes," said Colville. "That 's human nature under all circumstances. But why go to an Egyptian ball at all?"

"Oh, we *must* go. If we both stayed away it would make talk at once, and my object is to keep people in the dark till the very last moment. Of course it 's unfortunate your having told Mrs. Amsden that you were going away, and then telling her just after you came back with me that you were going to stay. But it can't be helped now. And I don't really care for it. But don't you see why I want you to go to all these things?"

"*All* these things?"

"Yes, everything you 're invited to after this. It 's not merely for a blind as regards ourselves now, but if they see that you 're very fond of all sorts of gaieties, they will see that you are—they will understand——"

There was no need for her to complete the sentence. Colville rose. "Come, come, my dear child," he said, "why don't you end all this at once? I don't blame you. Heaven knows I blame no one but myself! I ought to have the strength to break away from this mistake, but I haven't. I couldn't bear to see you suffer from pain that I should give you even for your good. But do it yourself, Imogene, and for pity's sake don't forbear from any notion of sparing me. I have no wish except for your happiness, and now I tell you clearly that no appearance we can put on before the world will deceive the world. At the end of all our trouble I shall still be forty——"

She sprang to him and put her hand over his mouth. "I know what you're going to say, and I won't let you say it, for you've promised over and over again not to speak of that any more. Oh, do you think I care for the world, or what it will think or say?"

"Yes, very much."

"That shows how little you understand me. It's because I wish to *defy* the world——"

"Imogene! Be as honest with yourself as you are with me."

"I *am* honest."

"Look me in the eyes, then."

She did so for an instant, and then hid her face on his shoulder.

"You silly girl," he said. "What is it you really do wish?"

"I wish there was no one in the world but you and me."

"Ah, you'd find it very crowded at times," said Colville sadly. "Well, well," he added, "I'll go to your fandangoes, because you want me to go."

"That's all I wished you to say," she replied, lifting her head, and looking him radiantly in the face. "I don't want you to go at all! I only want you to promise that you'll come here every night that you're invited out, and read to Mrs. Bowen and me."

"Oh, I can't do that," said Colville; "I'm too fond of society. For example, I've been invited to an Egyptian fancy ball, and I couldn't think of giving that up."

"Oh, how delightful you are! They couldn't any of them talk like you."

He had learned to follow the processes of her thought now. "Perhaps they can when they come to my age."

"There!" she exclaimed, putting her hand on his mouth again, to remind him of

another broken promise. "Why can't you give up the Egyptian ball?"

"Because I expect to meet a young lady there—a very beautiful young lady."

"But how shall you know her if she's disguised?"

"Why, I shall be disguised too, you know."

"Oh, what delicious nonsense you *do* talk! Sit down here and tell me what you are going to wear."

She tried to pull him back to the sofa. "What character shall you go in?"

"No, no," he said, resisting the gentle traction. "I can't; I have urgent business down-town."

"Oh! Business in *Florence!*"

"Well, if I stayed, I should tell you what disguise I'm going to the ball in."

"I knew it was that. What do you think would be a good character for me?"

"I don't know. The serpent of old Nile would be pretty good for you."

"Oh, I know you don't think it!" she cried fondly. She had now let him take her hand, and he stood holding it at arm's-length. Effie Bowen came into the room. "Good-bye," said Imogene, with an instant assumption of society manner.

"Good-bye," said Colville, and went out.

"Oh, Mr. Colville!" she called, before he got to the outer door.

"Yes," he said, starting back.

She met him midway of the dim corridor. "Only to——" She put her arms about his neck and sweetly kissed him.

Colville went out into the sunlight feeling like some strange, newly invented kind of scoundrel—a rascal of such recent origin and introduction that he had not yet had time to classify himself and ascertain the exact degree of his turpitude. The task employed his thoughts all that day, and kept him vibrating between an instinctive conviction of monstrous wickedness and a logical and well-reasoned perception that he had all the facts and materials for a perfectly good conscience. He was the betrothed lover of this poor child, whose affection he could not check without a degree of brutality for which only a better man would have the courage. When he thought of perhaps refusing her caresses, he imagined the shock it would give her, and the look of grief and mystification that would come into her eyes, and he found himself incapable of that cruel rectitude. He knew that these were the impulses of a white and loving soul; but at the end of

all his argument they remained a terror to him, so that he lacked nothing but the will to fly from Florence and shun her altogether till she had heard from her family. This, he recalled with bitter self-reproach, was what had been his first inspiration; he had spoken of it to Mrs. Bowen, and it had still everything in its favour except that it was impossible.

Imogene returned to the *salotto*, where the little girl was standing with her face to the window, drearily looking out; her back expressed an inner desolation which revealed itself in her eyes when Imogene caught her head between her hands, and tilted up her face to kiss it.

"What is the matter, Effie?" she demanded gaily.

"Nothing."

"Oh yes, there is."

"Nothing that you will care for. As long as he's pleasant to you, you don't care what he does to me."

"What has he done to you?"

"He didn't take the slightest notice of me when I came into the room. He didn't speak to me, or even look at me."

Imogene caught the little grieving, quivering face to her breast. "He is a wicked,

wicked wretch! And I will give him the awfulest scolding he ever had when he comes here again. I will teach him to neglect my pet. I will let him understand that if he doesn't notice you, he needn't notice me. I will tell you, Effie—I've just thought of a way. The next time he comes we will both receive him. We will sit up very stiffly on the sofa together, and just answer Yes, No, Yes, No, to everything he says, till he begins to take the hint, and learns how to behave himself. Will you?"

A smile glittered through the little girl's tears; but she asked, "Do you think it would be very polite?"

"No matter, polite or not, it's what he deserves. Of course, as soon as he begins to take the hint, we will be just as we always are."

Imogene despatched a note, which Colville got the next morning, to tell him of his crime, and apprise him of his punishment, and of the sweet compunction that had pleaded for him in the breast of the child. If he did not think he could help play the comedy through, he must come prepared to offer Effie some sort of atonement.

It was easy to do this: to come with his

pockets full of presents, and take the little girl on his lap, and pour out all his troubled heart in the caresses and tendernesses which would bring him no remorse. He humbled himself to her thoroughly, and with a strange sincerity in the harmless duplicity, and promised, if she would take him back into favour, that he would never offend again. Mrs. Bowen had sent word that she was not well enough to see him; she had another of her headaches; and he sent back a sympathetic and respectful message by Effie, who stood thoughtfully at her mother's pillow after she had delivered it, fingering the bouquet Colville had brought her, and putting her head first on this side, and then on that to admire it.

"I think Mr. Colville and Imogene are much more affectionate than they used to be," she said.

Mrs. Bowen started up on her elbow. "What do you mean, Effie?"

"Oh, they 're both so good to me."

"Yes," said her mother, dropping back to her pillow. "Both?"

"Yes; he 's the *most* affectionate."

The mother turned her face the other way. "Then he must be," she murmured.

"What?" asked the child.

"Nothing. I didn't know I spoke."

The little girl stood a while still playing with her flowers. "*I* think Mr. Colville is about the pleasantest gentleman that comes here. Don't you, mamma?"

"Yes."

"He 's so interesting, and says such nice things. I don't know whether children ought to think of such things, but I wish I was going to marry some one like Mr. Colville. Of course I should want to be tolerably old if I did. How old do you think a person ought to be to marry him?"

"You mustn't talk of such things, Effie," said her mother.

"No; I suppose it isn't very nice." She picked out a bud in her bouquet, and kissed it; then she held the nosegay at arm's-length before her, and danced away with it.

XVII.

IN the ensuing fortnight a great many gaieties besides the Egyptian ball took place, and Colville went wherever he and Imogene were both invited. He declined the quiet dinners which he liked, and which his hearty appetite and his habit of talk fitted him to enjoy, and accepted invitations to all sorts of evenings and At Homes, where dancing occupied a modest corner of the card, and usurped the chief place in the pleasures. At these places it was mainly his business to see Imogene danced with by others, but sometimes he waltzed with her himself, and then he was complimented by people of his own age, who had left off dancing, upon his vigour. They said they could not stand that sort of thing, though they supposed, if you kept yourself in practice, it did not come so hard. One of his hostesses, who had made a party for her daughters, told him that he was an example to everybody, and that if middle-aged people

at home mingled more in the amusements of the young, American society would not be the silly, insipid, boy-and-girl affair that it was now. He went to these places in the character of a young man, but he was not readily accepted or recognised in that character. They gave him frumps to take out to supper, mothers and maiden aunts, and if the mothers were youngish, they threw off on him, and did not care for his talk.

At one of the parties Imogene seemed to become aware for the first time that the lapels of his dress-coat were not faced with silk.

"Why don't you have them so?" she asked. "All the *other* young men have. And you ought to wear a *boutonnière*."

"Oh, I think a man looks rather silly in silk lapels at my——" He arrested himself, and then continued: "I'll see what the tailor can do for me. In the meantime, give me a bud out of your bouquet."

"How sweet you are!" she sighed. "You do the least thing so that it is ten times as good as if any one else did it."

The same evening, as he stood leaning against a doorway, behind Imogene and a young fellow with whom she was beginning a quadrille, he heard her taking him to task.

"Why do you say 'Sir' to Mr. Colville?"

"Well, I know the English laugh at us for doing it, and say it's like servants; but I never feel quite right answering just 'Yes' and 'No' to a man of his age."

This was one of the Inglehart boys, whom he met at nearly all of these parties, and not all of whom were so respectful. Some of them treated him upon an old-boy theory, joking him as freely as if he were one of themselves, laughing his antiquated notions of art to scorn, but condoning them because he was good-natured, and because a man could not help being of his own epoch anyway. They put a caricature of him among the rest on the walls of their *trattoria*, where he once dined with them.

Mrs. Bowen did not often see him when he went to call upon Imogene, and she was not at more than two or three of the parties. Mrs. Amsden came to chaperon the girl, and apparently suffered an increase of unrequited curiosity in regard to his relations to the Bowen household, and the extraordinary development of his social activity. Colville not only went to all those evening parties, but he was in continual movement during the afternoon at receptions and at "days," of which he began to

think each lady had two or three. Here he drank tea, cup after cup, in reckless excitement, and at night when he came home from the dancing parties, dropping with fatigue, he could not sleep till toward morning. He woke at the usual breakfast-hour, and then went about drowsing throughout the day till the tea began again in the afternoon. He fell asleep whenever he sat down, not only in the reading-room at Vieusseux's, where he disturbed the people over their newspapers by his demonstrations of somnolence, but even at church, whither he went one Sunday to please Imogene, and started awake during the service with the impression that the clergyman had been making a joke. Everybody but Imogene was smiling. At the café he slept without scruple, selecting a corner seat for the purpose, and proportioning his *buonamano* to the indulgence of the *giovane*. He could not tell how long he slept at these places, but sometimes it seemed to him hours.

One day he went to see Imogene, and while Effie Bowen stood prattling to him as he sat waiting for Imogene to come in, he faded light-headedly away from himself on the sofa, as if he had been in his corner at the café. Then he was aware of some

one saying "'Sh!" and he saw Effie Bowen, with her finger on her lip, turned toward Imogene, a figure of beautiful despair in the doorway. He was all tucked up with sofa pillows, and made very comfortable, by the child, no doubt. She slipped out, seeing him awake, so as to leave him and Imogene alone, as she had apparently been generally instructed to do, and Imogene came forward.

"What is the matter, Theodore?" she asked patiently. She had taken to calling him Theodore when they were alone. She owned that she did not like the name, but she said it was right she should call him by it, since it was his. She came and sat down beside him, where he had raised himself to a sitting posture, but she did not offer him any caress.

"Nothing," he answered. "But this climate is making me insupportably drowsy; or else the spring weather."

"Oh no; it isn't that," she said, with a slight sigh. He had left her in the middle of a german at three o'clock in the morning, but she now looked as fresh and lambent as a star. "It 's the late hours. They 're killing you."

Colville tried to deny it; his incoherencies dissolved themselves in a yawn, which he

did not succeed in passing for a careless laugh.

"It won't do," she said, as if speaking to herself; "no, it won't do."

"Oh yes, it will," Colville protested. "I don't mind being up. I've been used to it all my life on the paper. It's just some temporary thing. It'll come all right."

"Well, no matter," said Imogene. "It makes you ridiculous, going to all those silly places, and I'd rather give it up."

The tears began to steal down her cheeks, and Colville sighed. It seemed to him that somebody or other was always crying. A man never quite gets used to the tearfulness of women.

"Oh, don't mind it," he said. "If you wish me to go, I will go! Or die in the attempt," he added, with a smile.

Imogene did not smile with him. "I don't wish you to go any more. It was a mistake in the first place, and from this out I will adapt myself to you."

"And give up all your pleasures? Do you think I would let you do that? No, indeed! Neither in this nor in anything else. I will not cut off your young life in any way, Imogene—not shorten it or diminish it. If I thought I should do that, or

you would try to do it for me, I should wish I had never seen you."

"It isn't that. I know how good you are, and that you would do anything for me."

"Well, then, why don't you go to these fandangoes alone? I can see that you have me on your mind all the time, when I 'm with you."

"Oughtn't I?"

"Yes, up to a certain point, but not up to the point of spoiling your fun. I will drop in now and then, but I won't try to come to all of them, after this; you 'll get along perfectly well with Mrs. Amsden, and I shall be safe from her for a while. That old lady has marked me for her prey: I can see it in her glittering eyeglass. I shall fall asleep some evening between dances, and then she will get it all out of me."

Imogene still refused to smile. "No; I shall give it up. I don't think it's well, going so much without Mrs. Bowen. People will begin to talk."

"Talk?"

"Yes; they will begin to say that I had better stay with her a little more, if she isn't well."

"Why, isn't Mrs. Bowen well?" asked Colville, with trepidation.

"No; she's miserable. Haven't you noticed?"

"She sees me so seldom now. I thought it was only her headaches——"

"It's much more than that. She seems to be failing every way. The doctor has told her she ought to get away from Florence." Colville could not speak; Imogene went on. "She's always delicate, you know. And I feel that all that's keeping her here now is the news from home that I —we're waiting for."

Colville got up. "This is ghastly! She mustn't do it!"

"How can you help her doing it? If she thinks anything is right, she can't help doing it. Who could?"

Colville thought to himself that he could have said; but he was silent. At the moment he was not equal to so much joke or so much truth; and Imogene went on—

"She'd be all the more strenuous about it if it were disagreeable, and rather than accept any relief from *me* she would die."

"Is she—unkind to you?" faltered Colville.

"She is only *too* kind. You can feel that she's determined to be so—that she's said she will have nothing to reproach herself

with, and she won't. You don't suppose Mrs. Bowen would be unkind to any one she disliked?"

"Ah, I didn't know," sighed Colville.

"The more she disliked them, the better she would use them. It's because our engagement is so distasteful to her that she's determined to feel that she did nothing to oppose it."

"But how can you tell that it's distasteful, then?"

"She lets you feel it by—not saying anything about it."

"I can't see how——"

"She never speaks of you. I don't believe she ever mentions your name. She asks me about the places where I've been, and about the people—every one but you. It's very uncomfortable."

"Yes," said Colville, "it's uncomfortable."

"And if I allude to letters from home, she merely presses her lips together. It's perfectly wretched."

"I see. It's I whom she dislikes, and I would do anything to please her. She must know that," mused Colville aloud. "Imogene!" he exclaimed, with a sudden inspiration. "Why shouldn't I go away?"

"Go away?" she palpitated. "What should *I* do?"

The colours faded from his brilliant proposal. "Oh, I only meant till something was settled—determined—concluded; till this terrible suspense was over." He added hopelessly, "But nothing can be done!"

"I proposed," said Imogene, "that we should *all* go away. "I suggested Via Reggio—the doctor said she ought to have sea air—or Venice; but she wouldn't hear of it. No; we must wait."

"Yes, we must wait," repeated Colville hollowly. "Then nothing can be done?"

"Why, haven't you said it?"

"Oh yes—yes. I can't go away, and you can't. But couldn't we do something—get up something?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean, couldn't we—amuse her somehow? help her to take her mind off herself?"

Imogene stared at him rather a long time. Then, as if she had satisfied herself in her own mind, she shook her head. "She wouldn't submit to it."

"No; she seems to take everything amiss that I do," said Colville.

"She has no right to do that," cried Imo-

gene. "I 'm sure that you 're always considering her, and proposing to do things for her. I won't let you humble yourself, as if you had wronged her."

"Oh, I don't call it humbling. I—I should only be too happy if I could do *anything* that was agreeable to her."

"Very well, I will tell her," said the girl haughtily. "Shall you object to my joining you in your amusements, whatever they are? I assure you I will be very unobtrusive."

"I don't understand all this," replied Colville. "Who has proposed to exclude you? Why did you tell me anything about Mrs. Bowen if you didn't want me to say or do something? I supposed you did; but I 'll withdraw the offensive proposition, whatever it was."

"There was nothing offensive. But if you pity her so much, why can't you pity me a little?"

"I didn't know anything was the matter with you. I thought you were enjoying yourself——"

"Enjoying? Keeping you up at dances till you drop asleep whenever you sit down? And then coming home and talking to a person who won't mention your name! Do

you call that enjoying? I can't speak of you to any one; and no one speaks to me——"

"If you like, I will talk to you on the subject," Colville essayed, in dreary jest.

"Oh, don't joke about it! This perpetual joking, I believe it's that that's wearing me out. When I come to you for a little comfort in circumstances that drive me almost distracted, you want to amuse Mrs. Bowen, and when I ask to be allowed to share in the amusement, you laugh at me! If you don't understand it all, I'm sure *I* don't."

"Imogene!"

"No! It's very strange. There's only one explanation. You don't care for me."

"Not care for you!" cried Colville, thinking of his sufferings in the past fortnight.

"And I would have made any—*any* sacrifice for you. At least I wouldn't have made you show yourself a mean and grudging person if you had come to me for a little sympathy."

"O poor child!" he cried, and his heart ached with the sense that she really was nothing but an unhappy child. "I do sympathise with you, and I see how hard it is for you to manage with Mrs. Bowen's

dislike for me. But you mustn't think of it. I dare say it will be different; I've no doubt we can get her to look at me in some brighter light. I——" He did not know what he should urge next; but he goaded his invention, and was able to declare that if they loved each other they need not regard any one else. This flight, when accomplished, did not strike him as of very original effect, and it was with a dull surprise that he saw it sufficed for her.

"No; no one!" she exclaimed, accepting the platitude as if it were now uttered for the first time. She dried her eyes and smiled. "I will tell Mrs. Bowen how you feel and what you've said, and I know she will appreciate your generosity."

"Yes," said Colville pensively; "there's nothing I won't *propose* doing for people."

She suddenly clung to him, and would not let him go. "Oh, what is the matter?" she moaned afresh. "I show out the worst that is in me, and only the worst. Do you think I shall always be so narrow-minded with you? I thought I loved you enough to be magnanimous. *You* are. It seemed to me that our lives together would be grand and large; and here I am, grovelling in the lowest selfishness! I am worrying and

scolding you because you wish to please some one that has been as good as my own mother to me. Do you call that noble?"

Colville did not venture any reply to a demand evidently addressed to her own conscience.

But when she asked if he really thought he had better go away, he said, "Oh no; that was a mistake."

"Because, if you do, you shall—to punish me."

"My dearest girl, why should I wish to punish you?"

"Because I've been low and mean. Now I want you to do something for Mrs. Bowen—something to amuse her; to show that we appreciate her. And I don't want you to sympathise with me at all. When I ask for your sympathy, it's a sign that I don't deserve it."

"Is that so?"

"Oh, be serious with me. I mean it. And I want to beg your pardon for something."

"Yes; what's that?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

"You needn't have your lapels silk-lined. You needn't wear *boutonnières*."

"Oh, but I've had the coat changed."

"No matter! Change it back! It isn't for me to make you over. I must make myself over. It's my right, it's my sacred privilege to conform to you in every way, and I humble myself in the dust for having forgotten it at the very start. Oh, *do* you think I can ever be worthy of you? I *will* try; indeed I will! I shall not wear my light dresses another time! From this out, I shall dress more in keeping with you. I boasted that I should live to comfort and console you, to recompense you for the past, and what have I been doing? Wearying and degrading you!"

"Oh no," pleaded Colville. "I am very comfortable. I don't need any compensation for the past. I need—sleep. I'm going to bed to-night at eight o'clock, and I am going to sleep twenty-four hours. Then I shall be fresh for Mrs. Fleming's ball."

"I'm not going," said Imogene briefly.

"Oh yes, you are. I'll come round to-morrow evening and see."

"No. There are to be no more parties."

"Why?"

"I can't endure them."

She was looking at him and talking at him, but she seemed far aloof in the abs-

traction of a sublime regret; she seemed puzzled, bewildered at herself.

Colville got away. He felt the pathos of the confusion and question to which he left her, but he felt himself powerless against it. There was but one solution to it all, and that was impossible. He could only grieve over her trouble, and wait; grieve for the irrevocable loss which made her trouble remote and impersonal to him, and submit.

XVIII.

THE young clergyman whom Colville saw talking to Imogene on his first evening at Mrs. Bowen's had come back from Rome, where he had been spending a month or two, and they began to meet at Palazzo Pinti again. If they got on well enough together, they did not get on very far. The suave house-priest manners of the young clergyman offended Colville; he could hardly keep from sneering at his taste in art and books, which in fact was rather conventional; and no doubt Mr. Morton had his own reserves, under which he was perfectly civil, and only too deferential to Colville, as to an older man. Since his return, Mrs. Bowen had come back to her *salon*. She looked haggard; but she did what she could to look otherwise. She was always polite to Colville, and she was politely cordial with the clergyman. Sometimes Colville saw her driving out with him and Effie; they appeared to make excursions,

and he had an impression, very obscure, that Mrs. Bowen lent the young clergyman money; that he was a superstition of hers, and she a patron of his; he must have been ten years younger than she; not more than twenty-five.

The first Sunday after his return, Colville walked home with Mr. Waters from hearing a sermon of Mr. Morton's, which they agreed was rather well judged, and simply and fitly expressed.

"And he spoke with the authority of the priest," said the old minister. "His Church alone of all the Protestant Churches has preserved that to its ministers. Sometimes I have thought it was a great thing."

"Not always?" asked Colville, with a smile.

"These things are matters of mood rather than conviction with me," returned Mr. Waters. "Once they affected me very deeply; but now I shall so soon know all about it that they don't move me. But at times I think that if I were to live my life over again, I would prefer to be of some formal, some inflexibly ritualised, religion. At solemnities—weddings and funerals—I have been impressed with the advantage of the Anglican rite: it is the Church speaking

to and for humanity—or seems so," he added, with cheerful indifference. "Something in its favour," he continued, after a while, "is the influence that every ritualised faith has with women. If they apprehend those mysteries more subtly than we, such a preference of theirs must mean a good deal. Yes; the other Protestant systems are men's systems. Women must have form. They don't care for freedom."

"They appear to like the formalist too, as well as the form," said Colville, with scorn not obviously necessary.

"Oh yes; they must have everything in the concrete," said the old gentleman cheerfully.

"I wonder where Mr. Morton met Mrs. Bowen first," said Colville.

"Here, I think. I believe he had letters to her. Before you came I used often to meet him at her house. I think she has helped him with money at times."

"Isn't that rather an unpleasant idea?"

"Yes; it's disagreeable. And it places the ministry in a dependent attitude. But under our system it's unavoidable. Young men devoting themselves to the ministry frequently receive gifts of money."

"I don't like it," cried Colville.

"They don't feel it as others would. I didn't myself. Even at present I may be said to be living on charity. But sometimes I have fancied that in Mr. Morton's case there might be peculiarly mitigating circumstances."

"What do you mean?"

"When I met him first at Mrs. Bowen's I used to think that it was Miss Graham in whom he was interested——"

"I can assure you," interrupted Colville, "that she was never interested in him."

"Oh no; I didn't suppose that," returned the old man tranquilly. "And I've since had reason to revise my opinion. I think he is interested in Mrs. Bowen."

"Mrs. Bowen! And you think that would be a mitigating circumstance in his acceptance of money from her? If he had the spirit of a man at all, it would make it all the more revolting."

"Oh no, oh no," softly pleaded Mr. Waters. "We must not look at these things too romantically. He probably reasons that she would give him all her money if they were married."

"But he has no right to reason in that way," retorted Colville, with heat. "They are not married; it's ignoble and unmanly

for him to count upon it. It 's preposterous. She must be ten years older than he."

"Oh, I don't say that they 're to be married," Mr. Waters replied. "But these disparities of age frequently occur in marriage. I don't like them, though sometimes I think the evil is less when it is the wife who is the elder. We look at youth and age in a gross, material way too often. Women remain young longer than men. They keep their youthful sympathies; an old woman understands a young girl. Do you—or do I—understand a young man?"

Colville laughed harshly. "It isn't *quite* the same thing, Mr. Waters. But yes; I 'll admit, for the sake of argument, that I don't understand young men. I 'll go further, and say that I don't like them; I 'm afraid of them. And you wouldn't think," he added abruptly, "that it would be well for me to marry a girl twenty years younger than myself."

The old man glanced up at him with innocent slyness. "I prefer always to discuss these things in an impersonal way."

"But you can't discuss them impersonally with me; I 'm engaged to Miss Graham. Ever since you first found me here after I told you I was going away I have wished to

tell you this, and this seems as good a time as any—or as bad." The defiance faded from his voice, which dropped to a note of weary sadness. "Yes, we're engaged—or shall be, as soon as she can hear from her family. I wanted to tell you because it seemed somehow your due, and because I fancied you had a friendly interest in us both."

"Yes, that is true," returned Mr. Waters. "I wish you joy." He went through the form of offering his hand to Colville, who pressed it with anxious fervour.

"I confess," he said, "that I feel the risks of the affair. It's not that I have any dread for my own part; I have lived my life, such as it is. But the child is full of fancies about me that can't be fulfilled. She dreams of restoring my youth somehow, of retrieving the past for me, of avenging me at her own cost for an unlucky love affair that I had here twenty years ago. It's pretty of her, but it's terribly pathetic—it's tragic. I know very well that I'm a middle-aged man, and that there's no more youth for me. I'm getting grey, and I'm getting fat; I wouldn't be young if I could; it's a bore. I suppose I could keep up an illusion of youthfulness for five or six years more; and then if I

could be quietly chloroformed out of the way, perhaps it wouldn't have been so very bad."

"I have always thought," said Mr. Waters dreamily, "that a good deal might be said for abbreviating hopeless suffering. I have known some very good people advocate its practice by science."

"Yes," answered Colville. "Perhaps I've presented that point too prominently. What I wished you to understand was that I don't care for myself; that I consider only the happiness of this young girl that's somehow—I hardly know how—been put in my keeping. I haven't forgotten the talks that we've had heretofore on this subject, and it would be affectation and bad taste in me to ignore them. Don't be troubled at anything you've said; it was probably true, and I'm sure it was sincere. Sometimes I think that the kindest—the least cruel—thing I could do would be to break with her, to leave her. But I know that I shall do nothing of the kind; I shall drift. The child is very dear to me. She has great and noble qualities; she's supremely unselfish; she loves me through her mistaken pity, and because she thinks she can sacrifice herself to me. But she can't. Everything is against that; she doesn't know how, and there is no reason

why. I don't express it very well. I think nobody clearly understands it but Mrs. Bowen, and I've somehow alienated her."

He became aware that his self-abnegation was taking the character of self-pity, and he stopped.

Mr. Waters seemed to be giving the subject serious attention in the silence that ensued. "There is this to be remembered," he began, "which we don't consider in our mere speculations upon any phase of human affairs; and that is the wonderful degree of amelioration that any given difficulty finds in the realisation. It is the anticipation, not the experience, that is the trial. In a case of this kind, facts of temperament, of mere association, of union, work unexpected mitigations; they not only alleviate, they allay. You say that she cherishes an illusion concerning you: well, with women, nothing is so indestructible as an illusion. Give them any chance at all, and all the forces of their nature combine to preserve it. And if, as you say, she is so dear to you, that in itself is almost sufficient. I can well understand your misgivings, springing as they do from a sensitive conscience; but we may reasonably hope that they are ex-

aggerated. Very probably there will not be the rapture for her that there would be if—if you were younger; but the chances of final happiness are great—yes, very considerable. She will learn to appreciate what is really best in you, and you already understand her. Your love for her is the key to the future. Without that, of course——"

"Oh, of course," interrupted Colville hastily. Every touch of this comforter's hand had been a sting; and he parted with him in that feeling of utter friendlessness involving a man who has taken counsel upon the confession of half his trouble.

Something in Mrs. Bowen's manner when he met her next made him think that perhaps Imogene had been telling her of the sympathy he had expressed for her ill-health. It was in the evening, and Imogene and Mr. Morton were looking over a copy of *The Marble Faun*, which he had illustrated with photographs at Rome. Imogene asked Colville to look at it too, but he said he would examine it later; he had his opinion of people who illustrated *The Marble Faun* with photographs; it surprised him that she seemed to find something novel and brilliant in the idea.

Effie Bowen looked round where she was

kneeling on a chair beside the couple with the book, and seeing Colville wandering neglectedly about before he placed himself, she jumped down and ran and caught his hand.

"Well, what now?" he asked, with a dim smile, as she began to pull him toward the sofa. When he should be expelled from Palazzo Pinti he would really miss the worship of that little thing. He knew that her impulse had been to console him for his exclusion from the pleasures that Imogene and Mr. Morton were enjoying.

"Nothing. Just talk," she said, making him fast in a corner of the sofa by crouching tight against him.

"What about? About which is the pleasantest season?"

"Oh no; we've talked about that so often. Besides, of course you'd say spring, now that it's coming on so nicely."

"Do you think I'm so changeable as that? Haven't I always said winter when this question of the seasons was up? And I say it now. Sha'n't you be awfully sorry when you can't have a pleasant little fire on the hearth like this any more?"

"Yes; I know. But it's very nice having the flowers, too. The grass was all

full of daisies to-day—perfectly powdered with them."

"To-day? Where?"

"At the Cascine. And in under the trees there were millions of violets and crow's-feet. Mr. Morton helped me to get them for mamma and Imogene. And we stayed so long that when we drove home the daisies had all shut up, and the little pink leaves outside made it look like a field of red clover. Are you never going there any more?"

Mrs. Bowen came in. From the fact that there was no greeting between her and Mr. Morton, Colville inferred that she was returning to the room after having already been there. She stood a moment, with a little uncertainty, when she had shaken hands with him, and then dropped upon the sofa beyond Effie. The little girl ran one hand through Colville's arm, and the other through her mother's, and gripped them fast. "Now I have got you both," she triumphed, and smiled first into her face, and then into his.

"Be quiet, Effie," said her mother, but she submitted.

"I hope you're better for your drive to-day, Mrs. Bowen. Effie has been telling me about it."

"We stayed out a long time. Yes, I think the air did me good; but I 'm not an invalid, you know."

"Oh no."

"I 'm feeling a little fagged. And the weather was tempting. I suppose you 've been taking one of your long walks."

"No, I've scarcely stirred out. I usually feel like going to meet the spring a little more than half-way; but this year I don't, somehow."

"A good many people are feeling rather languid, I believe," said Mrs. Bowen.

"I hope you 'll get away from Florence," said Colville.

"Oh," she returned, with a faint flush, "I 'm afraid Imogene exaggerated that a little." She added, "You are very good."

She was treating him more kindly than she had ever done since that Sunday afternoon when he came in with Imogene to say that he was going to stay. It might be merely because she had worn out her mood of severity, as people do, returning in good-humour to those with whom they were offended, merely through the reconciling force of time. She did not look at him, but this was better than meeting his eye with that interceptive glance. A strange peace touched

his heart. Imogene and the young clergyman at the table across the room were intent on the book still; he was explaining and expatiating, and she listening. Colville saw that he had a fine head, and an intelligent, handsome, gentle face. When he turned again to Mrs. Bowen it was with the illusion that she had been saying something; but she was, in fact, sitting mute, and her face, with its bright colour, showed pathetically thin.

"I should imagine that Venice would be good for you," he said.

"It's still very harsh there, I hear. No; when we leave Florence, I think we will go to Switzerland."

"Oh, not to Madame Schebres's," pleaded the child, turning upon her.

"No, not to Madame Schebres," consented the mother. She continued, addressing Colville: "I was thinking of Lausanne. Do you know Lausanne at all?"

"Only from Gibbon's report. It's hardly up to date."

"I thought of taking a house there for the summer," said Mrs. Bowen, playing with Effie's fingers. "It's pleasant by the lake, I suppose."

"It's lovely by the lake!" cried the

child. "Oh, do go, mamma! I could get a boat and learn to row. Here you can't row, the Arno's so swift."

"The air would bring you up," said Colville to Mrs. Bowen. "Switzerland's the only country where you're perfectly sure of waking new every morning."

This idea interested the child. "Waking new!" she repeated.

"Yes; perfectly made over. You wake up another person. Shouldn't you think that would be nice?"

"No."

"Well, I shouldn't, in your place. But in mine, I much prefer to wake up another person. Only it's pretty hard on the other person."

"How queer you are!" The child set her teeth for fondness of him, and seizing his cheeks between her hands, squeezed them hard, admiring the effect upon his features, which in some respects was not advantageous.

"Effie!" cried her mother sternly; and she dropped to her place again, and laid hold of Colville's arm for protection. "You are really very rude. I shall send you to bed."

"Oh no, don't, Mrs. Bowen," he begged.

"I'm responsible for these violences. Effie used to be a very well behaved child before she began playing with me. It's all my fault."

They remained talking on the sofa together, while Imogene and Mr. Morton continued to interest themselves in the book. From time to time she looked over at them, and then turned again to the young clergyman, who, when he had closed the book, rested his hands on its top and began to give an animated account of something, conjecturably his sojourn in Rome.

In a low voice, and with pauses adjusted to the occasional silences of the young people across the room, Mrs. Bowen told Colville how Mr. Morton was introduced to her by an old friend who was greatly interested in him. She said, frankly, that she had been able to be of use to him, and that he was now going back to America very soon; it was as if she were privy to the conjecture that had come to the surface in his talk with Mr. Waters, and wished him to understand exactly how matters stood with the young clergyman and herself. Colville, indeed, began to be more tolerant of him; he succeeded in praising the sermon he had heard him preach.

"Oh, he has talent," said Mrs. Bowen.

They fell into the old, almost domestic strain, from which she broke at times with an effort, but returning as if helplessly to it. He had the gift of knowing how not to take an advantage with women; that sense of unconstraint in them fought in his favour; when Effie dropped her head wearily against his arm, her mother even laughed in sending her off to bed; she had hitherto been serious. Imogene said she would go to see her tucked in, and that sent the clergyman to say good-night to Mrs. Bowen, and to put an end to Colville's audience.

In these days, when Colville came every night to Palazzo Pinti, he got back the tone he had lost in the past fortnight. He thought that it was the complete immunity from his late pleasures, and the regular and sufficient sleep, which had set him firmly on his feet again, but he did not inquire very closely. Imogene went two or three times, after she had declared she would go no more, from the necessity women feel of blunting the edge of comment; but Colville profited instantly and fully by the release from the parties which she offered him. He did not go even to afternoon tea-drinkings; the "days" of the different ladies, which he

had been so diligent to observe, knew him no more. At the hours when society assembled in this house or that and inquired for him, or wondered about him, he was commonly taking a nap, and he was punctually in bed every night at eleven, after his return from Mrs. Bowen's.

He believed, of course, that he went there because he now no longer met Imogene elsewhere, and he found the house pleasanter than it had ever been since the veglione. Mrs. Bowen's relenting was not continuous, however. There were times that seemed to be times of question and of struggle with her, when she vacillated between the old cordiality and the later alienation; when she went beyond the former, or lapsed into moods colder and more repellent than the latter. It would have been difficult to mark the moment when these struggles ceased altogether, and an evening passed in unbroken kindness between them. But afterwards Colville could remember an emotion of grateful surprise at a subtle word or action of hers in which she appeared to throw all restraint—scruple or rancour, whichever it might be—to the winds, and become perfectly his friend again. It must have been by compliance with some wish or assent to

some opinion of his; what he knew was that he was not only permitted, he was invited, to feel himself the most favoured guest. The charming smile, so small and sweet, so very near to bitterness, came back to her lips, the deeply fringed eyelids were lifted to let the sunny eyes stream upon him. She did, now, whatever he asked her. She consulted his taste and judgment on many points; she consented to resume, when she should be a little stronger, their visits to the churches and galleries: it would be a shame to go away from Florence without knowing them thoroughly. It came to her asking him to drive with her and Imogene in the Cascine; and when Imogene made some excuse not to go, Mrs. Bowen did not postpone the drive, but took Colville and Effie.

They drove quite down to the end of the Cascine, and got out there to admire the gay monument, with the painted bust, of the poor young Indian prince who died in Florence. They strolled all about, talking of the old times in the Cascine, twenty years before; and walking up the road beside the canal, while the carriage slowly followed, they stopped to enjoy the peasants lying asleep in the grass on the other bank. Col-

ville and Effie gathered wild-flowers, and piled them in her mother's lap when she remounted to the carriage and drove along while they made excursions into the little dingles beside the road. Some people who overtook them in these sylvan pleasures reported the fact at a reception to which they were going, and Mrs. Amsden, whose mind had been gradually clearing under the simultaneous withdrawal of Imogene and Colville from society, professed herself again as thickly clouded as a weather-glass before a storm. She appealed to the sympathy of others against this hardship.

Mrs. Bowen took Colville home to dinner; Mr. Morton was coming, she said, and he must come too. At table the young clergyman made her his compliment on her look of health, and she said, Yes; she had been driving, and she believed that she needed nothing but to be in the air a little more, as she very well could, now the spring weather was really coming. She said that they had been talking all winter of going to Fiesole, where Imogene had never been yet; and upon comparison it appeared that none of them had yet been to Fiesole except herself. Then they must all go together, she said; the carriage would hold four very comfortably.

"Ah! that leaves me out," said Colville, who had caught sight of Effie's fallen countenance.

"Oh no. How is that? It leaves Effie out."

"It's the same thing. But I might ride, and Effie might give me her hand to hold over the side of the carriage; that would sustain me."

"We could take her between us, Mrs. Bowen," suggested Imogene. "The back seat is wide."

"Then the party is made up," said Colville, "and Effie hasn't demeaned herself by asking to go where she wasn't invited."

The child turned inquiringly toward her mother, who met her with an indulgent smile, which became a little flush of grateful appreciation when it reached Colville; but Mrs. Bowen ignored Imogene in the matter altogether.

The evening passed delightfully. Mr. Morton had another book which he had brought to show Imogene, and Mrs. Bowen sat a long time at the piano, striking this air and that of the songs which she used to sing when she was a girl: Colville was trying to recall them. When he and Imogene were left alone for their adieux,

they approached each other in an estrangement through which each tried to break.

"Why don't you scold me?" she asked. "I have neglected you the whole evening."

"How have you neglected me?"

"How? Ah! if you don't know——"

"No. I dare say I must be very stupid. I saw you talking with Mr. Morton, and you seemed interested. I thought I 'd better not intrude."

She seemed uncertain of his intention, and then satisfied of its simplicity.

"Isn't it pleasant to have Mrs. Bowen in the old mood again?" he asked.

"Is she in the old mood?"

"Why, yes. Haven't you noticed how cordial she is?"

"I thought she was rather colder than usual."

"Colder!" The chill of the idea penetrated even through the density of Colville's selfish content. A very complex emotion, which took itself for indignation, throbbed from his heart. "Is she cold with you, Imogene?"

"Oh, if you saw nothing——"

"No; and I think you must be mistaken. She never speaks of you without praising you."

"Does she speak of me?" asked the girl, with her honest eyes wide open upon him.

"Why, no," Colville acknowledged. "Come to reflect, it 's I who speak of you. But how—how is she cold with you?"

"Oh, I dare say it 's a delusion of mine. Perhaps I 'm cold with her."

"Then don't be so, my dear! Be sure that she 's your friend—true and good. Good night."

He caught the girl in his arms, and kissed her tenderly. She drew away, and stood a moment with her repellent fingers on his breast.

"Is it all for me?" she asked.

"For the whole obliging and amiable world," he answered gaily.

XIX.

THE next time Colville came he found himself alone with Imogene, who asked him what he had been doing all day.

"Oh, living along till evening. What have you?"

She did not answer at once, nor praise his speech for the devotion implied in it. After a while she said: "Do you believe in courses of reading? Mr. Morton has taken up a course of reading in Italian poetry. He intends to master it."

"Does he?"

"Yes. Do you think something of the kind would be good for me?"

"Oh, if you thirst for conquest. But I should prefer to rest on my laurels if I were you."

Imogene did not smile. "Mr. Morton thinks I should enjoy a course of Kingsley. He says he 's very earnest."

"Oh, immensely. But aren't you earnest enough already, my dear?"

"Do you think I 'm too earnest?"

"No; I should say you were just right."

"You know better than that. I wish you would criticise me sometimes."

"Oh, I 'd rather not."

"Why? Don't you see anything to criticise in me? Are you satisfied with me in every way? You ought to think. You ought to think now. Do you think that I am doing right in all respects? Am I all that I could be to you, and to you alone? If I am wrong in the least thing, criticise me, and I will try to be better."

"Oh, you might criticise back, and I shouldn't like that."

"Then you don't approve of a course of Kingsley?" asked the girl.

"Does that follow? But if you 're going in for earnestness, why don't you take up a course of Carlyle?"

"Do you think that would be better than Kingsley?"

"Not a bit. But Carlyle 's so earnest that he can't talk straight."

"I can't make out what you mean. Wouldn't you like me to improve?"

"Not much," laughed Colville. "If you did, I don't know what I should do. I

should have to begin to improve too, and I'm very comfortable as I am."

"I should wish to do it to—to be more worthy of you," grieved the girl, as if deeply disappointed at his frivolous behaviour.

He could not help laughing, but he was sorry, and would have taken her hand; she kept it from him, and removed to the farthest corner of the sofa. Apparently, however, her ideal did not admit of open pique, and she went on trying to talk seriously with him.

"You think, don't you, that we oughtn't to let a day pass without storing away some thought—suggestion——"

"Oh, there's no hurry," he said lazily. "Life is rather a long affair—if you live. There appears to be plenty of time, though people say not, and I think it would be rather odious to make every day of use. Let a few of them go by without doing anything for you! And as for reading, why not read when you're hungry, just as you eat? Shouldn't you hate to take up a course of roast beef, or a course of turkey?"

"Very well, then," said Imogene. "I shall not begin Kingsley."

"Yes, do it. I dare say Mr. Morton's quite right. He will look at these things

more from your own point of view. All the Kingsley novels are in the Tauchnitz. By all means do what he says."

"I will do what *you* say."

"Oh, but I say nothing."

"Then I will do nothing."

Colville laughed at this too, and soon after the clergyman appeared. Imogene met him so coldly that Colville felt obliged to make him some amends by a greater show of cordiality than he felt. But he was glad of the effort, for he began to like him as he talked to him; it was easy for him to like people; the young man showed sense and judgment, and if he was a little academic in his mind and manners, Colville tolerantly reflected that some people seemed to be born so, and that he was probably not artificial, as he had once imagined from the ecclesiastical scrupulosity of his dress.

Imogene ebbed away to the piano in the corner of the room, and struck some chords on it. At each stroke the young clergyman, whose eyes had wandered a little toward her from the first, seemed to vibrate in response. The conversation became incoherent before Mrs. Bowen joined them. Then, by a series of illogical processes, the clergyman was standing beside Imogene at the

piano, and Mrs. Bowen was sitting beside Colville on the sofa.

"Isn't there to be any Effie to-night?" he asked.

"No. She has been up too much of late. And I wished to speak with you—about Imogene."

"Yes," said Colville, not very eagerly. At that moment he could have chosen another topic.

"It is time that her mother should have got my letter. In less than a fortnight we ought to have an answer."

"Well?" said Colville, with a strange constriction of the heart.

"Her mother is a person of very strong character; her husband is absorbed in business, and defers to her in everything."

"It isn't an uncommon American situation," said Colville, relieving his tension by this excursion.

Mrs. Bowen ignored it. "I don't know how she may look at the affair. She may give her assent at once, or she may decide that nothing has taken place till—she sees you."

"I could hardly blame her for that," he answered submissively.

"It isn't a question of that," said Mrs.

Bowen. "It's a question of—others. Mr. Morton was here before you came, and I know he was interested in Imogene—I am certain of it. He has come back, and he sees no reason why he should not renew his attentions."

"No—o—o," faltered Colville.

"I wish you to realise the fact."

"But what would you——"

"I told you," said Mrs. Bowen, with a full return of that severity whose recent absence Colville had found so comfortable, "that I can't advise or suggest anything at all."

He was long and miserably silent. At last, "Did you ever think," he asked, "did you ever suppose—that is to say, did you ever suspect—that—she—that Imogene was —at all interested in him?"

"I think she was—at one time," said Mrs. Bowen promptly.

Colville sighed, with a wandering disposition to whistle.

"But that is nothing," she went on. "People have many passing fancies. The question is, what are you going to do now? I want to know, as Mr. Morton's friend."

"Ah, I wish you wanted to know as *my* friend, Mrs. Bowen!" A sudden thought

flashed upon him. "Why shouldn't I go away from Florence till Imogene hears from her mother? That seemed to me right in the first place. There is no tie that binds her to me. I hold her to nothing. If she finds in my absence that she likes this young man better——" An expression of Mrs. Bowen's face stopped him. He perceived that he had said something very shocking to her; he perceived that the thing was shocking in itself, but it was not that which he cared for. "I don't mean that I won't hold myself true to her as long as she will. I recognise my responsibility fully. I know that I am answerable for all this, and that no one else is; and I am ready to bear any penalty. But what I can't bear is that you should misunderstand me, that you should—— I have been so wretched ever since you first began to blame me for my part in this, and so happy this past fortnight that I can't—I *won't*—go back to that state of things. No; you have no right to relent toward me, and then fling me off as you have tried to do to-night! I have some feeling too—some rights. You shall receive me as a friend, or not at all! How can I live if you——"

She had been making little efforts as if to rise; now she forced herself to her feet, and ran from the room.

The young people looked up from their music; some wave of the sensation had spread to them, but seeing Colville remain seated, they went on with their playing till he rose. Then Imogene called out, "Isn't Mrs. Bowen coming back?"

"I don't know; I think not," answered Colville stupidly, standing where he had risen.

She hastened questioning toward him. "What is the matter? Isn't she well?"

Mr. Morton's face expressed a polite share in her anxiety.

"Oh yes; quite, I believe," Colville replied.

"She heard Effie call, I suppose," suggested the girl.

"Yes, yes; I think so; that is—yes. I must be going. Good night."

He took her hand and went away, leaving the clergyman still there; but he lingered only for a report from Mrs. Bowen, which Imogene hurried to get. She sent word that she would join them presently. But Mr. Morton said that it was late already, and he would beg Miss Graham to say good-

night for him. When Mrs. Bowen returned Imogene was alone.

She did not seem surprised or concerned at that. "Imogene, I have been talking to Mr. Colville about you and Mr. Morton."

The girl started and turned pale.

"It is almost time to hear from your mother, and she may consent to your engagement. Then you must be prepared to act."

"Act?"

"To make it known. Matters can't go on as they have been going. I told Mr. Colville that Mr. Morton ought to know at once."

"Why ought he to know?" asked Imogene, doubtless with that impulse to temporise which is natural to the human soul in questions of right and interest. She sank into the chair beside which she had been standing.

"If your mother consents, you will feel bound to Mr. Colville?"

"Yes," said the girl.

"And if she refuses?"

"He has my word. I will keep my word to him," replied Imogene huskily. "Nothing shall make me break it."

"Very well, then!" exclaimed Mrs.

Bowen. "We need not wait for your mother's answer. Mr. Morton ought to know, and he ought to know at once. Don't try to blind yourself, Imogene, to what you see as plainly as I do. He is in love with you."

"Oh," moaned the girl.

"Yes; you can't deny it. And it's cruel, it's treacherous, to let him go on thinking that you are free."

"I will never see him again."

"Ah! that isn't enough. He has a claim to know why. I will not let him be treated so."

They were both silent. Then, "What did Mr. Colville say?" asked Imogene.

"He? I don't know that he said anything. He——" Mrs. Bowen stopped.

Imogene rose from her chair.

"I will not let him tell Mr. Morton. It would be too indelicate."

"And shall you let it go on so?"

"No. I will tell him myself."

"How will you tell him?"

"I will tell him if he speaks to me."

"You will let it come to that?"

"There is no other way. I shall suffer more than he."

"But you will deserve to suffer, and your suffering will not help him."

Imogene trembled into her chair again.

"I see," said Mrs. Bowen bitterly, "how it will be at last. It will be as it has been from the first." She began to walk up and down the room, mechanically putting the chairs in place, and removing the disorder in which the occupancy of several people leaves a room at the end of an evening. She closed the piano, which Imogene had forgot to shut, with a clash that jarred the strings from their silence. "But I will do it, and I wonder——"

"You will speak to him?" faltered the girl.

"Yes!" returned Mrs. Bowen vehemently, and arresting herself in her rapid movements. "It won't do for you to tell him, and you won't let Mr. Colville."

"No, I can't," said Imogene, slowly shaking her head. "But I will discourage him; I will not see him any more." Mrs. Bowen silently confronted her. "I will not see any one now till I have heard from home."

"And how will that help? He must have some explanation, and I will have to make it. What shall it be?"

Imogene did not answer. She said: "I will not have any one know what is between me and Mr. Colville till I have heard from

home. If they try to refuse, then it will be for him to take me against their will. But if he doesn't choose to do that, then he shall be free, and I won't have him humiliated a second time before the world. *This* time *he* shall be the one to reject. And I don't care who suffers. The more I prize the person, the gladder I shall be; and if I could suffer before everybody I would. If people ever find it out, I will tell them that it was he who broke it off." She rose again from her chair, and stood flushed and thrilling with the notion of her self-sacrifice. Out of the tortuous complexity of the situation she had evolved this brief triumph, in which she rejoiced as if it were enduring success. But she suddenly fell from it in the dust. "Oh, what can I do for him? How can I make him feel more and more that I would give up anything, everything, for him! It's because he asks nothing and wants nothing that it's so hard! If I could see that he was unhappy, as I did once! If I could see that he was at all different since—since—— Oh, what I dread is this smooth tranquillity! If our lives could only be stormy and full of cares and anxieties and troubles that I could take on myself, then, then I shouldn't be afraid of the future! But I'm afraid they

won't be so—no, I 'm afraid that they will be easy and quiet, and then what shall I do? O Mrs. Bowen, do you think he cares for me?"

Mrs. Bowen turned white; she did not speak.

The girl wrung her hands. "Sometimes it seems as if he didn't—as if I had forced myself on him through a mistake, and he had taken me to save me from the shame of knowing that I had made a mistake. Do you think that is true? If you can only tell me that it isn't—— Or, no! If it is true, tell me that! *That* would be real mercy."

The other trembled, as if physically beaten upon by this appeal. But she gathered herself together rigidly. "How can I answer you such a thing as that? I mustn't listen to you; you mustn't ask me." She turned and left the girl standing still in her attitude of imploring. But in her own room, where she locked herself in, sobs mingled with the laughter which broke crazily from her lips as she removed this ribbon and that jewel, and pulled the bracelets from her wrists. A man would have plunged from the house and walked the night away; a woman must wear it out in her bed.

XX.

IN the morning Mrs. Bowen received a note from her banker covering a despatch by cable from America. It was from Imogene's mother; it acknowledged the letters they had written, and announced that she sailed that day for Liverpool. It was dated at New York, and it was to be inferred that after perhaps writing in answer to their letters, she had suddenly made up her mind to come out.

"Yes, that is it," said Imogene, to whom Mrs. Bowen hastened with the despatch. "Why should she have telegraphed to *you?*" she asked coldly, but with a latent fire of resentment in her tone.

"You must ask her when she comes," returned Mrs. Bowen, with all her gentleness. "It won't be long now."

They looked as if they had neither of them slept; but the girl's vigil seemed to have made her wild and fierce, like some bird

that has beat itself all night against its cage, and still from time to time feebly strikes the bars with its wings. Mrs. Bowen was simply worn to apathy.

"What shall you do about this?" she asked.

"Do about it? Oh, I will think. I will try not to trouble you."

"Imogene!"

"I shall have to tell Mr. Colville. But I don't know that I shall tell him at once. Give me the despatch, please." She possessed herself of it greedily, offensively. "I shall ask you not to speak of it."

"I will do whatever you wish."

"Thank you."

Mrs. Bowen left the room, but she turned immediately to re-open the door she had closed behind her.

"We were to have gone to Fiesole to-morrow," she said inquiringly.

"We can still go if the day is fine," returned the girl. "Nothing is changed. I wish very much to go. Couldn't we go to-day?" she added, with eager defiance.

"It 's too late to-day," said Mrs. Bowen quietly. "I will write to remind the gentlemen."

"Thank you. I wish we could have gone to-day."

"You can have the carriage if you wish to drive anywhere," said Mrs. Bowen.

"I will take Effie to see Mrs. Amsden." But Imogene changed her mind, and went to call upon two Misses Guicciardi, the result of an international marriage, whom Mrs. Bowen did not like very well. Imogene drove with them to the Cascine, where they bowed to a numerous military acquaintance, and they asked her if Mrs. Bowen would let her join them in a theatre party that evening: they were New-Yorkers by birth, and it was to be a theatre party in the New York style; they were to be chaperoned by a young married lady; two young men cousins of theirs, just out from America, had taken the box.

When Imogene returned home she told Mrs. Bowen that she had accepted this invitation. Mrs. Bowen said nothing, but when one of the young men came up to hand Imogene down to the carriage, which was waiting with the others at the gate, she could not have shown a greater tolerance of his second-rate New Yorkiness if she had been a Boston dowager offering him the scrupulous hospitalities of her city.

Imogene came in at midnight; she hummed an air of the opera as she took off her wraps and ornaments in her room, and this in the quiet of the hour had a terrible, almost profane effect: it was as if some other kind of girl had whistled. She showed the same nonchalance at breakfast, where she was prompt, and answered Mrs. Bowen's inquiries about her pleasure the night before with a liveliness that ignored the polite resolution that prompted them.

Mr. Morton was the first to arrive, and if his discouragement began at once, the first steps masked themselves in a reckless welcome, which seemed to fill him with joy, and Mrs. Bowen with silent perplexity. The girl ran on about her evening at the opera, and about the weather, and the excursion they were going to make; and after an apparently needless ado over the bouquet which he brought her, together with one for Mrs. Bowen, she put it into her belt, and made Colville notice it when he came: he had not thought to bring flowers.

He turned from her hilarity with anxious question to Mrs. Bowen, who did not meet his eye, and who snubbed Effie when the child found occasion to whisper: "*I* think Imogene is acting very strangely, for *her*;

don't you, mamma? It seems as if going with those Guicciardi girls just once had spoiled her."

"Don't make remarks about people, Effie," said her mother sharply. "It isn't nice in little girls, and I don't want you to do it. You talk too much lately."

Effie turned grieving away from this rejection, and her face did not light up even at the whimsical sympathy in Colville's face, who saw that she had met a check of some sort; he had to take her on his knee and coax and kiss her before her wounded feelings were visibly healed. He put her down with a sighing wish that some one could take him up and soothe his troubled sensibilities too, and kept her hand in his while he sat waiting for the last of those last moments in which the hurrying delays of ladies preparing for an excursion seem never to end.

When they were ready to get into the carriage, the usual contest of self-sacrifice arose, which Imogene terminated by mounting to the front seat; Mr. Morton hastened to take the seat beside her, and Colville was left to sit with Effie and her mother. "You old people will be safer back there," said Imogene. It was a little joke which she ad-

dressed to the child, but a gleam from her eye as she turned to speak to the young man at her side visited Colville in desperate defiance. He wondered what she was about in that allusion to an idea which she had shrunk from so sensitively hitherto. But he found himself in a situation which he could not penetrate at any point. When he spoke with Mrs. Bowen, it was with a dark undercurrent of conjecture as to how and when she expected him to tell Mr. Morton of his relation to Imogene, or whether she still expected him to do it; when his eyes fell upon the face of the young man, he despaired as to the terms in which he should put the fact; any form in which he tacitly dramatised it remained very embarrassing, for he felt bound to say that while he held himself promised in the matter, he did not allow her to feel herself so.

A sky of American blueness and vastness, a mellow sun, and a delicate breeze did all that these things could for them, as they began the long, devious climb of the hills crowned by the ancient Etruscan city. At first they were all in the constraint of their own and one another's moods, known or imagined, and no talk began till the young clergyman turned to Imogene and asked,

after a long look at the smiling landscape, "What sort of weather do you suppose they are having at Buffalo to-day?"

"At Buffalo?" she repeated, as if the place had only a dim existence in her remotest consciousness. "Oh! The ice isn't near out of the lake yet. You can't count on it before the first of May."

"And the first of May comes sooner or later, according to the season," said Colville. "I remember coming on once in the middle of the month, and the river was so full of ice between Niagara Falls and Buffalo that I had to shut the car window that *I'd* kept open all the way through Southern Canada. But we have very little of that local weather at home; our weather is as democratic and continental as our political constitution. Here it's March or May any time from September till June, according as there's snow on the mountains or not."

The young man smiled. "But don't you like," he asked with deference, "this slow, orderly advance of the Italian spring, where the flowers seem to come out one by one, and every blossom has its appointed time?"

"Oh yes, it's very well in its way; but I prefer the rush of the American spring; no thought of mild weather this morning; a

warm, gusty rain to-morrow night; day after to-morrow a burst of blossoms and flowers and young leaves and birds. I don't know whether we were made for our climate or our climate was made for us, but its impatience and lavishness seem to answer some inner demand of our go-ahead souls. This happens to be the week of the peach blossoms here, and you see their pink everywhere to-day, and you don't see anything else in the blossom line. But imagine the American spring abandoning a whole week of her precious time to the exclusive use of peach blossoms! She wouldn't do it; she's got too many other things on hand."

Effie had stretched out over Colville's lap, and with her elbow sunk deep in his knee, was resting her chin in her hand and taking the facts of the landscape thoroughly in. "Do they have just a week?" she asked.

"Not an hour more or less," said Colville. "If they found an almond blossom hanging round anywhere after their time came, they would make an awful row; and if any lazy little peach-blow hadn't got out by the time their week was up, it would have to stay in till next year; the pear blossoms wouldn't let it come out."

"Wouldn't they?" murmured the child,

in dreamy sympathy with this belated peach-blow.

"Well, that's what people say. In America it would be allowed to come out any time. It's a free country."

Mrs. Bowen offered to draw Effie back to a posture of more decorum, but Colville put his arm round the little girl. "Oh, let her stay! It doesn't incommode me, and she must be getting such a novel effect of the landscape."

The mother fell back into her former attitude of jaded passivity. He wondered whether she had changed her mind about having him speak to Mr. Morton; her quiescence might well have been indifference; one could have said, knowing the whole situation, that she had made up her mind to let things take their course, and struggle with them no longer.

He could not believe that she felt content with him; she must feel far otherwise; and he took refuge, as he had the power of doing, from the discomfort of his own thoughts in jesting with the child, and mocking her with this extravagance and that; the discomfort then became merely a dull ache that insisted upon itself at intervals, like a grumbling tooth.

The prospect was full of that mingled wildness and subordination that gives its supreme charm to the Italian landscape; and without elements of great variety, it combined them in infinite picturesqueness. There were olive orchards and vineyards, and again vineyards and olive orchards. Closer to the farm-houses and cottages there were peaches and other fruit trees and kitchen-gardens; broad ribbons of grain waved between the ranks of trees; around the white villas the spires of the cypresses pierced the blue air. Now and then they came to a villa with weather-beaten statues strutting about its parterres. A mild, pleasant heat brooded upon the fields and roofs, and the city, dropping lower and lower as they mounted, softened and blended its towers and monuments in a sombre mass shot with gleams of white.

Colville spoke to Imogene, who withdrew her eyes from it with a sigh, after long brooding upon the scene. "You can do nothing with it, I see."

"With what?"

"The landscape. It's too full of every possible interest. What a history is written all over it, public and private! If you don't take it simply like any other landscape, it

becomes an oppression. It 's well that tourists come to Italy so ignorant, and keep so. Otherwise they couldn't live to get home again ; the past would crush them."

Imogene scrutinised him as if to extract some personal meaning from his words, and then turned her head away. The clergyman addressed him with what was like a respectful toleration of the drolleries of a gifted but eccentric man, the flavour of whose talk he was beginning to taste.

"You don't really mean that one shouldn't come to Italy as well informed as possible?"

"Well, I did," said Colville, "but I don't."

The young man pondered this, and Imogene started up with an air of rescuing them from each other—as if she would not let Mr. Morton think Colville trivial or Colville consider the clergyman stupid, but would do what she could to take their minds off the whole question. Perhaps she was not very clear as to how this was to be done ; at any rate she did not speak, and Mrs. Bowen came to her support, from whatever motive of her own. It might have been from a sense of the injustice of letting Mr. Morton suffer from the complications that involved herself and the others. The affair had been going

very hitchily ever since they started, with the burden of the conversation left to the two men and that helpless girl; if it were not to be altogether a failure she must interfere.

"Did you ever hear of Gratiano when you were in Venice?" she asked Mr. Morton.

"Is he one of their new water-colourists?" returned the young man. "I heard they had quite a school there now."

"No," said Mrs. Bowen, ignoring her failure as well as she could; "he was a famous talker; he loved to speak an infinite deal of nothing more than any man in Venice."

"An ancestor of mine, Mr. Morton," said Colville; "a poor, honest man, who did his best to make people forget that the ladies were silent. Thank you, Mrs. Bowen, for mentioning him. I wish he were with us to-day."

The young man laughed. "Oh, in the *Merchant of Venice!*"

"No other," said Colville.

"I confess," said Mrs. Bowen, "that I *am* rather stupid this morning. I suppose it's the softness of the air; it's been harsh and irritating so long. It makes me drowsy."

"Don't mind *us*," returned Colville. "We

will call you at important points." They were driving into a village at which people stop sometimes to admire the works of art in its church. "Here, for example, is—— What place is this?" he asked of the coachman.

"San Domenico."

"I should know it again by its beggars." Of all ages and sexes they swarmed round the carriage, which the driver had instinctively slowed to oblige them, and thrust forward their hands and hats. Colville gave Effie his small change to distribute among them, at sight of which they streamed down the street from every direction. Those who had received brought forward the halt and blind, and did not scruple to propose being rewarded for this service. At the same time they did not mind his laughing in their faces; they laughed too, and went off content, or as nearly so as beggars ever are. He buttoned up his pocket as they drove on more rapidly. "I am the only person of no principle—except Effie—in the carriage, and yet I am at this moment carrying more blessings out of this village than I shall ever know what to do with. Mrs. Bowen, I know, is regarding me with severe disapproval. She thinks that I ought to have sent the beggars

of San Domenico to Florence, where they would all be shut up in the Pia Casa di Ricovero, and taught some useful occupation. It 's terrible in Florence. You can walk through Florence now and have no appeal made to your better nature that is not made at the appellant's risk of imprisonment. When I was there before, you had opportunities of giving at every turn."

"You can send a cheque to the Pia Casa," said Mrs. Bowen.

"Ah, but what good would that do me? When I give I want the pleasure of it; I want to see my beneficiary cringe under my bounty. But I 've tried in vain to convince you that the world has gone wrong in other ways. Do you remember the one-armed man whom we used to give to on the Lung' Arno? That persevering sufferer has been repeatedly arrested for mendicancy, and obliged to pay a fine out of his hard earnings to escape being sent to your Pia Casa."

Mrs. Bowen smiled, and said, Was he living yet? in a pensive tone of reminiscence. She was even more than patient of Colville's nonsense. It seemed to him that the light under her eyelids was sometimes a grateful light. Confronting Imogene and the young man whose hopes of her he was to destroy

at the first opportunity, the lurid moral atmosphere which he breathed seemed threatening to become a thing apparent to sense, and to be about to blot the landscape. He fought it back as best he could, and kept the hovering cloud from touching the earth by incessant effort. At times he looked over the side of the carriage, and drew secretly a long breath of fatigue. It began to be borne in upon him that these ladies were using him ill in leaving him the burden of their entertainment. He became angry, but his heart softened, and he forgave them again, for he conjectured that he was the cause of the cares that kept them silent. He felt certain that the affair had taken some new turn. He wondered if Mrs. Bowen had told Imogene what she had demanded of him. But he could only conjecture and wonder in the dreary undercurrent of thought that flowed evenly and darkly on with the talk he kept going. He made the most he could of the varying views of Florence which the turns and mounting levels of the road gave him. He became affectionately grateful to the young clergyman when he replied promptly and fully, and took an interest in the objects or subjects he brought up.

Neither Mrs. Bowen nor Imogene was altogether silent. The one helped on at times wearily, and the other broke at times from her abstraction. Doubtless the girl had undertaken too much in insisting upon a party of pleasure with her mind full of so many things, and doubtless Mrs. Bowen was sore with a rankling resentment at her insistence, and vexed at herself for having yielded to it. If at her time of life, and with all her experience of it, she could not rise under this inner load, Imogene must have been crushed by it.

Her starts from the dreamy oppression, if that were what kept her silent, took the form of aggression, when she disagreed with Colville about things he was saying, or attacked him for this or that thing which he had said in times past. It was an unhappy and unamiable self-assertion, which he was not able to compassionate so much when she resisted or defied Mrs. Bowen, as she seemed seeking to do at every point. Perhaps another would not have felt it so: it must have been largely in his consciousness; the young clergyman seemed not to see anything in these bursts but the indulgence of a gay caprice, though his laughing at them did not alleviate the effect to Colville, who, when he

turned to Mrs. Bowen for her alliance, was astonished with a prompt snub, unmistakable to himself, however imperceptible to others.

He found what diversion and comfort he could in the party of children who beset them at a point near the town, and followed the carriage, trying to sell them various light and useless trifles made of straw — fans, baskets, parasols, and the like. He bought recklessly of them and gave them to Effie, whom he assured, without the applause of the ladies, and with the grave question of the young clergyman, that the vendors were little Etruscan girls, all at least twenty-five hundred years old. "It 's very hard to find any Etruscans under that age; most of the grown-up people are three thousand."

The child humoured his extravagance with the faith in fable which children are able to command, and said, "Oh, tell me about them!" while she pushed up closer to him, and began to admire her presents, holding them up before her, and dwelling fondly upon them one by one.

"Oh, there 's very little to tell," answered Colville. "They 're mighty close people, and always keep themselves very much *to* themselves. But wouldn't you like to see a

party of Etruscans of all ages, even down to little babies only eleven or twelve hundred years old, come driving into an American town? It would make a great excitement, wouldn't it?"

"It would be splendid."

"Yes; we would give them a collation in the basement of the City Hall, and drive them out to the cemetery. The Americans and Etruscans are very much alike in that—they always show you their tombs."

"Will they in Fiesole?"

"How you always like to burrow into the past!" interrupted Imogene.

"Well, it 's rather difficult burrowing into the future," returned Colville defensively. Accepting the challenge, he added: "Yes, I should really like to meet a few Etruscans in Fiesole this morning. I should feel as if I 'd got amongst my contemporaries at last; they would understand me."

The girl's face flushed. "Then no one else can understand you?"

"Apparently not. I am the great American *incompris.*"

"I 'm sorry for you," she returned feebly; and, in fact, sarcasm was not her strong point.

When they entered the town they found

the Etruscans preoccupied with other visitors, whom at various points in the quaint little piazza they surrounded in dense groups, to their own disadvantage as guides and beggars and dealers in straw goods. One of the groups reluctantly dispersed to devote itself to the new arrivals, and these then perceived that it was a party of artists, scattered about and sketching, which had absorbed the attention of the population. Colville went to the restaurant to order lunch, leaving the ladies to the care of Mr. Morton. When he came back he found the carriage surrounded by the artists, who had turned out to be the Inglehart boys. They had walked up to Fiesole the afternoon before, and they had been sketching there all the morning. With the artist's indifference to the conventional objects of interest, they were still ignorant of what ought to be seen in Fiesole by tourists, and they accepted Colville's proposition to be of his party in going the rounds of the Cathedral, the Museum, and the view from that point of the wall called the Belvedere. They found that they had been at the Belvedere before without knowing that it merited particular recognition, and some of them had made sketches from it—of bits of architecture and

landscape, and of figure amongst the women with straw fans and baskets to sell, who thronged round the whole party again, and interrupted the prospect. In the church they differed amongst themselves as to the best bits for study, and Colville listened in whimsical despair to the enthusiasm of their likings and dislikings. All that was so far from him now; but in the Museum, which had only a thin interest based upon a small collection of art and archæology, he suffered a real affliction in the presence of a young Italian couple, who were probably plighted lovers. They went before a grey-haired pair, who might have been the girl's father and mother, and they looked at none of the objects, though they regularly stopped before them and waited till their guide had said his say about them. The girl, clinging tight to the young man's arm, knew nothing but him; her mouth and eyes were set in a passionate concentration of her being upon him, and he seemed to walk in a dream of her. From time to time they peered upon each other's faces, and then they paused, rapt and indifferent to all besides.

The young painters had their jokes about it; even Mr. Morton smiled, and Mrs. Bowen recognised it. But Imogene did not

smile; she regarded the lovers with an interest in them scarcely less intense than their interest in each other; and a cold perspiration of question broke out on Colville's forehead. Was that her ideal of what her own engagement should be? Had she expected him to behave in that way to her, and to accept from her a devotion like that girl's? How bitterly he must have disappointed her! It was so impossible to him that the thought of it made him feel that he must break all ties which bound him to anything like it. And yet he reflected that the time was when he could have been equal to that, and even more.

After lunch the painters joined them again, and they all went together to visit the ruins of the Roman theatre and the stretch of Etruscan wall beyond it. The former seems older than the latter, whose huge blocks of stone lie as firmly and evenly in their courses as if placed there a year ago; the turf creeps to the edge at top, and some small trees nod along the crest of the wall, whose ancient face, clean and bare, looks sternly out over a vast prospect, now young and smiling in the first delight of spring. The piety or interest of the community, which guards the entrance to the theatre by a fee of certain

centesimi, may be concerned in keeping the wall free from the grass and vines which are stealing the half-excavated arena back to forgetfulness and decay; but whatever agency it was, it weakened the appeal that the wall made to the sympathy of the spectators. They could do nothing with it; the artists did not take their sketch-blocks from their pockets. But in the theatre, where a few broken columns marked the place of the stage, and the stone benches of the auditorium were here and there reached by a flight of uncovered steps, the human interest returned.

"I suspect that there is such a thing as a ruin's being too old," said Colville. "Our Etruscan friends made the mistake of building their wall several thousand years too soon for our purpose."

"Yes," consented the young clergyman. "It seems as if our own race became alienated from us through the mere effect of time, don't you think, sir? I mean, of course, terrestrially."

The artists looked uneasy, as if they had not counted upon anything of this kind, and they began to scatter about for points of view. Effie got her mother's leave to run up and down one of the stairways, if she

would not fall. Mrs. Bowen sat down on one of the lower steps, and Mr. Morton took his place respectfully near her.

"I wonder how it looks from the top?" Imogene asked this of Colville, with more meaning than seemed to belong to the question properly.

"There is nothing like going to see," he suggested. He helped her up, giving her his hand from one course of seats to another. When they reached the point which commanded the best view of the whole, she sat down, and he sank at her feet, but they did not speak of the view.

"Theodore, I want to tell you something," she said abruptly. "I have heard from home."

"Yes?" he replied, in a tone in which he did his best to express a readiness for any fate.

"Mother has telegraphed. She is coming out. She is on her way now. She will be here very soon."

Colville did not know exactly what to say to these passionately consecutive statements. "Well?" he said at last.

"Well"—she repeated his word—"what do you intend to do?"

"Intend to do in what event?" he asked,

lifting his eyes for the first time to the eyes which he felt burning down upon him.

"If she should refuse."

Again he could not command an instant answer, but when it came it was a fair one. "It isn't for me to say what I shall do," he replied gravely. "Or, if it is, I can only say that I will do whatever you wish."

"Do *you* wish nothing?"

"Nothing but your happiness."

"Nothing but my happiness!" she retorted. "What is my happiness to me? Have I ever sought it?"

"I can't say," he answered; "but if I did not think you would find it——"

"I shall find it, if ever I find it, in yours," she interrupted. "And what shall you do if my mother will not consent to our engagement?"

The experienced and sophisticated man—for that in no ill way was what Colville was—felt himself on trial for his honour and his manhood by this simple girl, this child. He could not endure to fall short of her ideal of him at that moment, no matter what error or calamity the fulfilment involved. "If you feel sure that you love me, Imogene, it will make no difference to me what your mother says. I would be

glad of her consent; I should hate to go counter to her will; but I know that I am good enough man to be true and keep you all my life the first in all my thoughts, and that's enough for me. But if you have any fear, any doubt of yourself, now is the time——"

Imogene rose to her feet as in some turmoil of thought or emotion that would not suffer her to remain quiet.

"Oh, keep still!" "Don't get up yet!" "Hold on a minute, please!" came from the artists in different parts of the theatre, and half a dozen imploring pencils were waved in the air.

"They are sketching you," said Colville, and she sank compliantly into her seat again.

"I have no doubt for myself—no," she said, as if there had been no interruption.

"Then we need have no anxiety in meeting your mother," said Colville, with a light sigh, after a moment's pause. "What makes you think she will be unfavourable?"

"I don't think that; but I thought—I didn't know but——"

"What?"

"Nothing, now." Her lips were quiver-

ing; he could see her struggle for self-control, but he could not see it unmoved.

"Poor child!" he said, putting out his hand toward her.

"Don't take my hand; they're all looking," she begged.

He forbore, and they remained silent and motionless a little while, before she had recovered herself sufficiently to speak again.

"Then we are promised to each other, whatever happens," she said.

"Yes."

"And we will never speak of this again. But there is one thing. Did Mrs. Bowen ask you to tell Mr. Morton of our engagement?"

"She said that I ought to do so."

"And did you say you would?"

"I don't know. But I suppose I ought to tell him."

"I don't wish you to!" cried the girl.

"You don't wish me to tell him?"

"No; I will not have it!"

"Oh, very well; it's much easier not. But it seems to me that it's only fair to him."

"Did you think of that yourself?" she demanded fiercely.

"No," returned Colville, with sad self-

recognition. "I 'm afraid I 'm not apt to think of the comforts and rights of other people. It was Mrs. Bowen who thought of it."

"I knew it!"

"But I must confess that I agreed with her, though I would have preferred to postpone it till we heard from your family." He was thoughtfully silent a moment; then he said, "But if their decision is to have no weight with us, I think he ought to be told at once."

"Do you think that I am flirting with him?"

"Imogene!" exclaimed Colville reproachfully.

"That 's what you imply; that 's what she implies."

"You 're very unjust to Mrs. Bowen, Imogene."

"Oh, you always defend her! It isn't the first time you 've told me I was unjust to her."

"I don't mean that you are willingly unjust, or could be so, to any living creature, least of all to her. But I—we—owe her so much; she has been so patient."

"What do we owe her? How has she been patient?"

"She has overcome her dislike to me."

"Oh, indeed!"

"And—and I feel under obligation to her for—in a thousand little ways; and I should be glad to feel that we were acting with her approval; I should like to please her."

"You wish to tell Mr. Morton?"

"I think I ought."

"To please Mrs. Bowen! Tell him, then. You always cared more to please her than me. Perhaps you stayed in Florence to please her!"

She rose and ran down the broken seats and ruined steps so recklessly and yet so sure-footedly that it seemed more like a flight than a pace to the place where Mrs. Bowen and Mr. Morton were talking together.

Colville followed as he could, slowly and with a heavy heart. A good thing develops itself in infinite and unexpected shapes of good, a bad thing into manifold and astounding evils. This mistake was whirling away beyond his recall in hopeless mazes of error. He saw this generous young spirit betrayed by it to ignoble and unworthy excess, and he knew that he and not she was to blame.

He was helpless to approach her, to speak

with her, to set her right, great as the need of that was, and he could see that she avoided him. But their relations remained outwardly undisturbed. The artists brought their sketches for inspection and comment, and, without speaking to each other, he and Imogene discussed them with the rest.

When they started homeward the painters said they were coming a little way with them for a send-off, and then going back to spend the night in Fiesole. They walked beside the carriage, talking with Mrs. Bowen and Imogene, who had taken their places, with Effie between them, on the back seat; and when they took their leave, Colville and the young clergyman, who had politely walked with them, continued on foot a little further, till they came to the place where the highway to Florence divided into the new road and the old. At this point it steeply overtops the fields on one side, which is shored up by a wall some ten or twelve feet deep; and here round a sharp turn of the hill on the other side came a peasant driving a herd of the black pigs of the country.

Mrs. Bowen's horses were, perhaps, pampered beyond the habitual resignation of Florentine horses to all manner of natural phenomena; they reared at the sight of the

sable crew, and backing violently uphill, set the carriage across the road, with its hind wheels a few feet from the brink of the wall. The coachman sprang from his seat, the ladies and the child remained in theirs as if paralysed.

Colville ran forward to the side of the carriage. "Jump, Mrs. Bowen! jump, Effie! Imogene——"

The mother and the little one obeyed. He caught them in his arms and set them down. The girl sat still, staring at him with reproachful, with disdainful eyes.

He leaped forward to drag her out; she shrank away, and then he flew to help the coachman, who had the maddened horses by the bit.

"Let go!" he heard the young clergyman calling to him; "she's safe!" He caught a glimpse of Imogene, whom Mr. Morton had pulled from the other side of the carriage. He struggled to free his wrist from the curb-bit chain of the horse, through which he had plunged it in his attempt to seize the bridle. The wheels of the carriage went over the wall; he felt himself whirled into the air, and then swung ruining down into the writhing and crashing heap at the bottom of the wall.

XXI.

WHEN Colville came to himself his first sensation was delight in the softness and smoothness of the turf on which he lay. Then the strange colour of the grass commended itself to his notice, and presently he perceived that the thing under his head was a pillow, and that he was in bed. He was supported in this conclusion by the opinion of the young man who sat watching him a little way off, and who now smiled cheerfully at the expression in the eyes which Colville turned inquiringly upon him.

"Where am I?" he asked, with what appeared to him very unnecessary feebleness of voice.

The young man begged his pardon in Italian, and when Colville repeated his question in that tongue, he told him that he was in Palazzo Pinti, whither he had been brought from the scene of his accident. He added that Colville must not talk till the doctor had seen him and given him leave,

and he explained that he was himself a nurse from the hospital, who had been taking care of him.

Colville moved his head and felt the bandage upon it; he desisted in his attempt to lift his right arm to it before the attendant could interfere in behalf of the broken limb. He recalled dimly and fragmentarily long histories that he had dreamed, but he forbore to ask how long he had been in his present case, and he accepted patiently the apparition of the doctor and other persons who came and went, and were at his bedside or not there, as it seemed to him, between the opening and closing of an eye. As the days passed they acquired greater permanence and maintained a more uninterrupted identity. He was able to make quite sure of Mr. Morton and of Mr. Waters; Mrs. Bowen came in, leading Effie, and this gave him a great pleasure. Mrs. Bowen seemed to have grown younger and better. Imogene was not among the phantoms who visited him; and he accepted her absence as quiescently as he accepted the presence of the others. There was a cheerfulness in those who came that permitted him no anxiety, and he was too weak to invite it by any conjecture. He consented to be spared

and to spare himself; and there were some things about the affair which gave him a singular and perhaps not wholly sane content. One of these was the man nurse who had evidently taken care of him throughout. He celebrated, whenever he looked at this capable person, his escape from being, in the odious helplessness of sickness, a burden upon the strength and sympathy of the two women for whom he had otherwise made so much trouble. His satisfaction in this had much to do with his recovery, which, when it once began, progressed rapidly to a point where he was told that Imogene and her mother were at a hotel in Florence, waiting till he should be strong enough to see them. It was Mrs. Bowen who told him this with an air which she visibly strove to render non-committal and impersonal, but which betrayed, nevertheless, a faint apprehension for the effect upon him. The attitude of Imogene and her mother was certainly not one to have been expected of people holding their nominal relation to him, but Colville had been revising his impressions of events on the day of his accident; Imogene's last look came back to him, and he could not think the situation altogether unaccountable.

"Have I been here a long time?" he asked, as if he had not heeded what she told him.

"About a fortnight," answered Mrs. Bowen.

"And Imogene—how long has she been away?"

"Since they knew you would get well."

"I will see them any time," he said quietly.

"Do you think you are strong enough?"

"I shall never be stronger till I have seen them," he returned, with a glance at her. "Yes; I want them to come to-day. I shall not be excited; don't be troubled—if you were going to be," he added. "Please send to them at once."

Mrs. Bowen hesitated, but after a moment left the room. She returned in half an hour with a lady who revealed even to Colville's languid regard evidences of the character which Mrs. Bowen had attributed to Imogene's mother. She was a large, robust person, laced to sufficient shapeliness, and she was well and simply dressed. She entered the room with a waft of some clean, wholesome perfume, and a quiet temperament and perfect health looked out of her clear, honest eyes — the eyes of Imogene

Graham, though the girl's were dark and the woman's were blue. When Mrs. Bowen had named them to each other, in withdrawing, Mrs. Graham took Colville's weak left hand in her fresh, strong right, and then lifted herself a chair to his bedside, and sat down.

"How do you do to-day, sir?" she said, with a touch of old-fashioned respectfulness in the last word. "Do you think you are quite strong enough to talk with me?"

"I think so," said Colville, with a faint smile. "At least I can listen with fortitude."

Mrs. Graham was not apparently a person adapted to joking. "I don't know whether it will require much fortitude to hear what I have to say or not," she said, with her keen gaze fixed upon him. "It's simply this: I am going to take Imogene home."

She seemed to expect that Colville would make some reply to this, and he said blankly, "Yes?"

"I came out prepared to consent to what she wished, after I had seen you, and satisfied myself that she was not mistaken; for I had always promised myself that her choice should be perfectly untrammelled, and I have tried to bring her up with principles

and ideas that would enable her to make a good choice."

"Yes," said Colville again. "I 'm afraid you didn't take her temperament and her youth into account, and that she disappointed you."

"No; I can't say that she did. It isn't that at all. I see no reason to blame her for her choice. Her mistake was of another kind."

It appeared to Colville that this very sensible and judicial lady found an intellectual pleasure in the analysis of the case, which modified the intensity of her maternal feeling in regard to it, and that, like many people who talk well, she liked to hear herself talk in the presence of another appreciative listener. He did not offer to interrupt her, and she went on. "No, sir, I am not disappointed in her choice. I think her chances of happiness would have been greater, in the abstract, with one nearer her own age; but that is a difference which other things affect so much that it did not alarm me greatly. Some people are younger at your age than at hers. No, sir, that is not the point." Mrs. Graham fetched a sigh, as if she found it easier to say what was not the point than to say what was,

and her clear gaze grew troubled. But she apparently girded herself for the struggle. "As far as you are concerned, Mr. Colville, I have not a word to say. Your conduct throughout has been most high-minded and considerate and delicate."

It is hard for any man to deny merits attributed to him, especially if he has been ascribing to himself the opposite demerits. But Colville summoned his dispersed forces to protest against this.

"Oh, no, no," he cried. "Anything but that. My conduct has been selfish and shameful. If you could understand all——"

"I think I do understand all—at least far more, I regret to say, than my daughter has been willing to tell me. And I am more than satisfied with you. I thank you and honour you."

"Oh no; don't say that," pleaded Colville. "I really can't stand it."

"And when I came here it was with the full intention of approving and confirming Imogene's decision. But I was met at once by a painful and surprising state of things. You are aware that you have been very sick?"

"Dimly," said Colville.

"I found you very sick, and I found my daughter frantic at the error which she had

discovered in herself—discovered too late, as she felt." Mrs. Graham hesitated, and then added abruptly, "She had found out that she did not love you."

"Didn't love me?" repeated Colville feebly.

"She had been conscious of the truth before, but she had stifled her misgivings insanely, and, as I feel, almost wickedly, pushing on, and saying to herself that when you were married, then there would be no escape, and she *must* love you."

"Poor girl! poor child! I see, I see."

"But the accident that was almost your death saved her from that miserable folly and iniquity. Yes," she continued, in answer to the protest in his face, "folly and iniquity. I found her half crazed at your bedside. She was fully aware of your danger, but while she was feeling all the remorse that she ought to feel—that any one could feel—she was more and more convinced that she never had loved you and never should. I can give you no idea of her state of mind."

"Oh, you needn't! you needn't! Poor, poor child!"

"Yes, a child indeed. If it had not been for the pity I felt for her—— But no matter

about that. She saw at last that if your heroic devotion to her"—Colville did his best to hang his pillowed head for shame—"if your present danger did not awaken her to some such feeling for you as she had once imagined she had; if they both only increased her despair and self-abhorrence, then the case was indeed hopeless. She was simply distracted. I had to tear her away almost by force. She has had a narrow escape from brain-fever. And now I have come to implore, to *demand*"—Mrs. Graham, with all her poise and calm, was rising to the hysterical key—"her release from a fate that would be worse than death for such a girl. I mean marrying without the love of her whole soul. She esteems you, she respects you, she admires you, she likes you; but——" Mrs. Graham pressed her lips together, and her eyes shone.

"She is free," said Colville, and with the words a mighty load rolled from his heart. "There is no need to demand anything."

"I know."

"There hasn't been an hour, an instant, during—since I—we—spoke together that I wouldn't have released her if I could have known what you tell me now."

"Of course!—of course!"

"I have had my fears—my doubts; but whenever I approached the point I found no avenue by which we could reach a clearer understanding. I could not say much without seeming to seek for myself the release I was offering her."

"Naturally. And what added to her wretchedness was the suspicion at the bottom of all that she had somehow forced herself upon you—misunderstood you, and made you say and do things to spare her that you would not have done voluntarily." This was advanced tentatively. In the midst of his sophistications Colville had, as most of his sex have, a native, fatal, helpless truthfulness, which betrayed him at the most unexpected moments, and this must now have appeared in his countenance. The lady rose haughtily. She had apparently been considering him, but, after all, she must have been really considering her daughter. "If anything of the kind was the case," she said, "I will ask you to spare her the killing knowledge. It 's quite enough for *me* to know it. And allow me to say, Mr. Colville, that it would have been far kinder in you——"

"Ah, *think*, my dear madam!" he exclaimed. "How *could* I?"

She did think, evidently, and when she spoke it was with a generous emotion, in which there was no trace of pique.

"You couldn't. You have done right; I feel that, and I will trust you to say anything you will to my daughter."

"To your daughter? Shall I see her?"

"She came with me. She wished to beg your forgiveness."

Colville lay silent. "There is no forgiveness to be asked or granted," he said, at length. "Why should she suffer the pain of seeing me?—for it would be nothing else. What do you think? Will it do her any good hereafter? I don't care for myself."

"I don't know what to think," said Mrs. Graham. "She is a strange child. She may have some idea of reparation."

"Oh, beseech her from me not to imagine that any reparation is due! Where there has been an error there must be blame; but wherever it lies in ours, I am sure it isn't at her door. Tell her I say this; tell her that I acquit her with all my heart of every shadow of wrong; that I am not unhappy, but glad for her sake and my own that this has ended as it has." He stretched his left hand across the coverlet to her, and said,

with the feebleness of exhaustion, "Good-bye. Bid her good-bye for me."

Mrs. Graham pressed his hand and went out. A moment after the door was flung open, and Imogene burst into the room. She threw herself on her knees beside his bed. "I will *pray* to you!" she said, her face intense with the passions working in her soul. She seemed choking with words which would not come; then, with an inarticulate cry that must stand for all, she caught up the hand that lay limp on the coverlet; she crushed it against her lips, and ran out of the room.

He sank into a deathly torpor, the physical refusal of his brain to take account of what had passed. When he woke from it, little Effie Bowen was airily tiptoeing about the room, fondly retouching its perfect order. He closed his eyes, and felt her come to him and smooth the sheet softly under his chin. Then he knew she must be standing with clasped hands admiring the effect. Some one called her in whisper from the door. It closed, and all was still again.

XXII.

COLVILLE got himself out of the comfort and quiet of Mrs. Bowen's house as soon as he could. He made the more haste because he felt that if he could have remained with the smallest trace of self-respect, he would have been glad to stay there for ever.

Even as it was, the spring had advanced to early summer, and the sun was lying hot and bright in the piazzas, and the shade dense and cool in the narrow streets, before he left Palazzo Pinti; the Lung' Arno was a glare of light that struck back from the curving line of the buff houses; the river had shrivelled to a rill in its bed; the black cypresses were dim in the tremor of the distant air on the hill-slopes beyond; the olives seemed to swelter in the sun, and the villa walls to burn whiter and whiter. At evening the mosquito began to wind his tiny horn. It was the end of May, and nearly everybody but the Florentines had gone out

of Florence, dispersing to Villa Reggio by the sea, to the hills of Pistoja, and to the high, cool air of Siena. More than once Colville had said that he was keeping Mrs. Bowen after she ought to have got away, and she had answered that she liked hot weather, and that this was not comparable to the heat of Washington in June. She was looking very well, and younger and prettier than she had since the first days of their renewed acquaintance in the winter. Her southern complexion enriched itself in the sun; sometimes when she came into his room from outdoors the straying brown hair curled into loose rings on her temples, and her cheeks glowed a deep red.

She said those polite things to appease him as long as he was not well enough to go away, but she did not try to detain him after his strength sufficiently returned. It was the blow on the head that kept him longest. After his broken arm and his other bruises were quite healed, he was aware of physical limits to thinking of the future or regretting the past, and this sense of his powerlessness went far to reconcile him to a life of present inaction and oblivion. Theoretically he ought to have been devoured by remorse and chagrin, but as a matter of fact

he suffered very little from either. Even in people who are in full possession of their capacity for mental anguish one observes that after they have undergone a certain amount of pain they cease to feel.

Colville amused himself a good deal with Effie's endeavours to entertain him and take care of him. The child was with him every moment that she could steal from her tasks, and her mother no longer attempted to stem the tide of her devotion. It was understood that Effie should joke and laugh with Mr. Colville as much as she chose; that she should fan him as long as he could stand it; that she should read to him when he woke, and watch him when he slept. She brought him his breakfast, she petted him and caressed him, and wished to make him a monster of dependence and self-indulgence. It seemed to grieve her that he got well so fast.

The last night before he left the house she sat on his knee by the window looking out beyond the firefly twinkle of Oltrarno, to the silence and solid dark of the solemn company of hills beyond. They had not lighted the lamps because of the mosquitoes, and they had talked till her head dropped against his shoulder.

Mrs. Bowen came in to get her. "Why, is she asleep?"

"Yes. Don't take her yet," said Colville.

Mrs. Bowen rustled softly into the chair which Effie had left to get into Colville's lap. Neither of them spoke, and he was so richly content with the peace, the tacit sweetness of the little moment, that he would have been glad to have it silently endure for ever. If any troublesome question of his right to such a moment of bliss obtruded itself upon him, he did not concern himself with it.

"We shall have another hot day to-morrow," said Mrs. Bowen at length. "I hope you will find your room comfortable."

"Yes: it's at the back of the hotel, mighty high, and wide, and no sun ever comes into it except when they show it to foreigners in winter. Then they get a few rays to enter as a matter of business, on condition that they won't detain them. I dare say I shall stay there some time. I suppose you will be getting away from Florence very soon."

"Yes. But I haven't decided where to go yet."

"Should you like some general expression of my gratitude for all you 've done for me, Mrs. Bowen?"

"No; I would rather not. It has been a great pleasure—to Effie."

"Oh, a luxury beyond the dreams of avarice." They spoke in low tones, and there was something in the hush that suggested to Colville the feasibility of taking into his unoccupied hand one of the pretty hands which the pale nightlight showed him lying in Mrs. Bowen's lap. But he forbore, and only sighed. "Well, then, I will say nothing. But I shall keep on thinking all my life."

She made no answer.

"When you are gone, I shall have to make the most of Mr. Waters," he said.

"He is going to stop all summer, I believe."

"Oh yes. When I suggested to him the other day that he might find it too hot, he said that he had seventy New England winters to thaw out of his blood, and that all the summers he had left would not be more than he needed. One of his friends told him that he could cook eggs in his piazza in August, and he said that he should like nothing better than to cook eggs

there. He 's the most delightfully expatriated compatriot I 've ever seen."

"Do you like it?"

"It 's well enough for him. Life has no claims on him any more. I think it 's very pleasant over here, now that everybody 's gone," added Colville, from a confused resentfulness of collectively remembered Days and Afternoons and Evenings. "How still the night is!"

A few feet clapping by on the pavement below alone broke the hush.

"Sometimes I feel very tired of it all, and want to get home," sighed Mrs. Bowen.

"Well, so do I."

"I can't believe it 's right staying away from the country so long." People often say such things in Europe.

"No, I don't either, if you 've got anything to do there."

"You can always make something to do there."

"Oh yes." Some young men, breaking from a street near by, began to sing. "We shouldn't have that sort of thing at home."

"No," said Mrs. Bowen pensively.

"I heard just such singing before I fell asleep the night after that party at Madame Uccelli's, and it filled me with fury."

"Why should it do that?"

"I don't know. It seemed like voices from our youth—Lina."

She had no resentment of his use of her name in the tone with which she asked: "Did you hate that so much?"

"No; the loss of it."

They both fetched a deep breath.

"The Uccellis have a villa near the baths of Lucca," said Mrs. Bowen. "They have asked me to go."

"Do you think of going?" inquired Colville. "I've always fancied it must be pleasant there."

"No; I declined. Sometimes I think I will just stay on in Florence."

"I dare say you'd find it perfectly comfortable. There's nothing like having the range of one's own house in summer." He looked out of the window on the blue-black sky.

"'And deepening through their silent spheres,
Heaven over heaven rose the night,'"

he quoted. "It's wonderful! Do you remember how I used to read *Mariana in the South* to you and poor Jenny? How it must have bored her! What an ass I was!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bowen breathlessly, in

sympathy with his reminiscence rather than in agreement with his self-denunciation.

Colville broke into a laugh, and then she began to laugh too; but not quite willingly as it seemed.

Effie started from her sleep. "What—what is it?" she asked, stretching and shivering as half-awakened children do."

"Bed-time," said her mother promptly, taking her hand to lead her away. "Say good-night to Mr. Colville."

The child turned and kissed him. "Good night," she murmured.

"Good night, you sleepy little soul!" It seemed to Colville that he must be a pretty good man, after all, if this little thing loved him so.

"Do you always kiss Mr. Colville good-night?" asked her mother when she began to undo her hair for her in her room.

"Sometimes. Don't you think it's nice?"

"Oh yes; nice enough."

Colville sat by the window a long time thinking Mrs. Bowen might come back; but she did not return.

Mr. Waters came to see him the next afternoon at his hotel.

"Are you pretty comfortable here?" he asked.

"Well, it's a change," said Colville. "I miss the little one awfully."

"She's a winning child," admitted the old man. "That combination of conventionality and *naïveté* is very captivating. I notice it in the mother."

"Yes, the mother has it too. Have you seen them to-day?"

"Yes; Mrs. Bowen was sorry to be out when you came."

"I had the misfortune to miss them. I had a great mind to go again to-night."

The old man said nothing to this. "The fact is," Colville went on, "I'm so habituated to being there that I'm rather spoiled."

"Ah, it's a nice place," Mr. Waters admitted.

"Of course I made all the haste I could to get away, and I have the reward of a good conscience. But I don't find that the reward is very great."

The old gentleman smiled. "The difficulty is to know conscience from self-interest."

"Oh, there's no doubt of it in my case," said Colville. "If I'd consulted my own comfort and advantage, I should still be at Palazzo Pinti."

"I dare say they would have been glad to keep you."

"Do you really think so?" asked Colville, with sudden seriousness. "I wish you would tell me why. Have you any reason—grounds? Pshaw! I'm absurd!" He sank back into the easy-chair from whose depths he had pulled himself in the eagerness of his demand, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Mr. Waters, you remember my telling you of my engagement to Miss Graham?"

"Yes."

"That is broken off—if it were ever really on. It was a great mistake for both of us—a tragical one for her, poor child, a ridiculous one for me. My only consolation is that it *was* a mistake and no more; but I don't conceal from myself that I might have prevented it altogether if I had behaved with greater wisdom and dignity at the outset. But I 'm afraid I was flattered by an illusion of hers that ought to have pained and alarmed me, and the rest followed inevitably, though I was always just on the point of escaping the consequences of my weakness —my wickedness."

"Ah, there is something extremely interesting in all that," said the old minister

thoughtfully. "The situation used to be figured under the old idea of a compact with the devil. His debtor was always on the point of escaping, as you say, but I recollect no instance in which he did not pay at last. The myth must have arisen from man's recognition of the inexorable sequence of cause from effect, in the moral world, which even repentance cannot avert. Goethe tries to imagine an atonement for Faust's trespass against one human soul in his benefactions to the race at large; but it is a very cloudy business."

"It isn't quite a parallel case," said Colville, rather sulkily. He had, in fact, suffered more under Mr. Waters's generalisation than he could from a more personal philosophy of the affair.

"Oh no; I didn't think that," consented the old man.

"And I don't think I shall undertake any extended scheme of drainage or subsoiling in atonement for my little dream," Colville continued, resenting the parity of outline that grew upon him in spite of his protest. They were both silent for a while, and then Colville cried out, "Yes, yes; they are alike. *I* dreamed, too, of recovering and restoring my own lost and broken past in

the love of a young soul, and it was in essence the same cruelly egotistic dream; and it's nothing in my defence that it was all formless and undirected at first, and that as soon as I recognised it I abhorred it."

"Oh yes, it is," replied the old man, with perfect equanimity. "Your assertion is the hysterical excess of Puritanism in all times and places. In the moral world we are responsible only for the wrong that we intend. It can't be otherwise."

"And the evil that's suffered for the wrong we didn't intend?"

"Ah, perhaps that isn't evil."

"It's pain!"

"It's pain, yes."

"And to have wrung a young and innocent heart with the anguish of self-doubt, with the fear of wrong to another, with the shame of an error such as I allowed, perhaps encouraged her to make——"

"Yes," said the old man. "The young suffer terribly. But they recover. Afterward we don't suffer so much, but we don't recover. I wouldn't defend you against yourself if I thought you seriously in the wrong. If you know yourself to be, you shouldn't let me."

Thus put upon his honour Colville was a

long time thoughtful. "How can I tell?" he asked. "You know the facts; you can judge."

"If I were to judge at all, I should say you were likely to do a greater wrong than any you have committed."

"I don't understand you."

"Miss Graham is a young girl, and I have no doubt that the young clergyman—what was his name?"

"Morton. Do you think—do you suppose there was anything in that?" demanded Colville, with eagerness, that a more humorous observer than Mr. Waters might have found ludicrous. "He was an admirable young fellow, with an excellent head and a noble heart. I underrated him at one time, though I recognised his good qualities afterward; but I was afraid she did not appreciate him."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the old man, with an astuteness of manner which Colville thought authorised by some sort of definite knowledge.

"I would give the world if it were so!" he cried fervently.

"But you are really very much more concerned in something else."

"In what else?"

"Can't you imagine?"

"No," said Colville; but he felt himself growing very red in the face.

"Then I have no more to say."

"Yes, speak!" And after an interval Colville added, "Is it anything about—you hinted at something long ago—Mrs. Bowen?"

"Yes;" the old man nodded his head. "Do you owe her nothing?"

"Owe her nothing? Everything! My life! What self-respect is left me! Immeasurable gratitude! The homage of a man saved from himself as far as his stupidity and selfishness would permit! Why, I—I love her!" The words gave him courage. "In every breath and pulse! She is the most beautiful and gracious and wisest and best woman in the world! I have loved her ever since I met her here in Florence last winter. Good heavens! I must have always loved her! But," he added, falling from the rapture of this confession, "she simply loathes *me!*"

"It was certainly not to your credit that you were willing at the same time to marry some one else."

"Willing! I wasn't willing! I was bound hand and foot! Yes—I don't care

what you think of my weakness—I was not a free agent. It 's very well to condemn one's-self, but it may be carried too far; injustice to others is not the only injustice, or the worst. What I was willing to do was to keep my word — to prevent that poor child, if possible, from ever finding out her mistake."

If Colville expected this heroic confession to impress his listener he was disappointed. Mr. Waters made him no reply, and he was obliged to ask, with a degree of sarcastic impatience, "I suppose you scarcely blame me for that?"

"Oh, I don't know that I blame people for things. There are times when it seems as if we were all puppets, pulled this way or that, without control of our own movements. Hamlet was able to browbeat Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with his business of the pipe; but if they had been in a position to answer they might have told him that it required far less skill to play upon a man than any other instrument. Most of us, in fact, go sounding on without any special application of breath or fingers, repeating the tunes that were played originally upon other men. It appears to me that you suffered yourself to do something of the kind in this affair.

We are a long time learning to act with common-sense or even common sanity in what are called matters of the affections. A broken engagement *may* be a bad thing in some cases, but I am inclined to think that it is the very best thing that could happen in most cases where it happens. The evil is done long before; the broken engagement is merely sanative, and so far beneficent."

The old gentleman rose, and Colville, dazed by the recognition of his own cowardice and absurdity, did not try to detain him. But he followed him down to the outer gate of the hotel. The afternoon sun was pouring into the piazza a sea of glimmering heat, into which Mr. Waters plunged with the security of a salamander. He wore a broad-brimmed Panama hat, a sack coat of black alpaca, and loose trousers of the same material, and Colville fancied him doubly defended against the torrid waves not only by the stored cold of half a century of winters at Haddam East Village, but by an inner coolness of spirit, which appeared to diffuse itself in an appreciable atmosphere about him. It was not till he was gone that Colville found himself steeped in perspiration, and glowing with a strange excitement.

XXIII.

COLVILLE went back to his own room, and spent a good deal of time in the contemplation of a suit of clothes, adapted to the season, which had been sent home from the tailor's just before Mr. Waters came in. The coat was of the lightest serge, the trousers of a pearly grey tending to lavender, the waistcoat of cool white duck. On his way home from Palazzo Pinti he had stopped in Via Tornabuoni and bought some silk gauze neckties of a tasteful gaiety of tint, which he had at the time thought very well of. But now, as he spread out the whole array on his bed, it seemed too emblematic of a light and blameless spirit for his wear. He ought to put on something as nearly analogous to sackcloth as a modern stock of dry-goods afforded; he ought, at least, to wear the grave materials of his winter costume. But they were really insupportable in this sudden access of summer.

Besides, he had grown thin during his sickness, and the things bagged about him. If he were going to see Mrs. Bowen that evening, he ought to go in some decent shape. It was perhaps providential that he had failed to find her at home in the morning, when he had ventured thither in the clumsy attire in which he had been loafing about her drawing-room for the past week. He now owed it to her to appear before her as well as he could. How charmingly punctilious she always was herself!

As he put on his new clothes he felt the moral support which the becomingness of dress alone can give. With the blue silk gauze lightly tied under his collar, and the lapels of his thin coat thrown back to admit his thumbs to his waistcoat pockets, he felt almost cheerful before his glass. Should he shave? As once before, this important question occurred to him. His thinness gave him some advantages of figure, but he thought that it made his face older. What effect would cutting off his beard have upon it? He had not seen the lower part of his face for fifteen years. No one could say what recent ruin of a double chin might not be lurking there. He decided not to shave, at least till after dinner, and after

dinner he was too impatient for his visit to brook the necessary delay.

He was shown into the salotto alone, but Effie Bowen came running in to meet him. She stopped suddenly, bridling.

"You never expected to see me looking quite so pretty," said Colville, tracing the cause of her embarrassment to his summer splendour. "Where is your mamma?"

"She is in the dining-room," replied the child, getting hold of his hand. "She wants you to come and have coffee with us."

"By all means—not that I haven't had coffee already, though."

She led the way, looking up at him shyly over her shoulder as they went.

Mrs. Bowen rose, napkin in lap, and gave him a hand of welcome. "How are you feeling to-day?" she asked, politely ignoring his finery.

"Like a new man," he said. And then he added, to relieve the strain of the situation, "Of the best tailor's make in Florence."

"You look very well," she smiled.

"Oh, I always do when I take pains," said Colville. "The trouble is that I don't always take pains. But I thought I would to-night, in calling upon a lady."

"Effie will feel very much flattered," said Mrs. Bowen.

"Don't refuse a portion of the satisfaction," he cried.

"Oh, is it for me too?"

This gave Colville consolation which no religion or philosophy could have brought him, and his pleasure was not marred, but rather heightened, by the little pangs of expectation, bred by long custom, that from moment to moment Imogene would appear. She did not appear, and a thrill of security succeeded upon each alarm. He wished her well with all his heart; such is the human heart, that he wished her arrived home the betrothed of that excellent, that wholly unobjectionable young man, Mr. Morton.

"Will you have a little of the ice before your coffee?" asked Mrs. Bowen, proposing one of the moulded creams with her spoon.

"Yes, thank you. Perhaps I will take it in place of the coffee. They forgot to offer us any ice at the *table d'hôte* this evening."

"This is rather luxurious for us," said Mrs. Bowen. "It 's a compromise with Effie. She wanted me to take her to Giacosa's this afternoon."

"I *thought* you would come," whispered the child to Colville.

Her mother made a little face of mock surprise at her. "Don't give yourself away, Effie."

"Why, let us go to Giacosa's too," said Colville, taking the ice. "We shall be the only foreigners there, and we shall not even feel ourselves foreign. It's astonishing how the hot weather has dispersed the tourists. I didn't see a Baedeker on the whole way up here, and I walked down Via Tornabuoni across through Porta Rosso and the Piazza della Signoria and the Uffizzi. You've no idea how comfortable and homelike it was—all the statues loafing about in their shirt sleeves, and the objects of interest stretching and yawning round, and having a good rest after their winter's work."

Effie understood Colville's way of talking well enough to enjoy this; her mother did not laugh.

"Walked?" she asked.

"Certainly. Why not?"

"You are getting well again. You 'll soon be gone too."

"I've *got* well. But as to being gone, there's no hurry. I rather think I shall wait now to see how long you stay."

"We may keep you all summer," said Mrs. Bowen, dropping her eyelids indifferently.

"Oh, very well. All summer it is, then. Mr. Waters is going to stay, and he is such a very cool old gentleman that I don't think one need fear the wildest antics of the mercury where he is."

When Colville had finished his ice, Mrs. Bowen led the way to the salotto, and they all sat down by the window there and watched the sunset die on San Miniato. The bronze copy of Michelangelo's David, in the Piazzale below the church, blackened in perfect relief against the pink sky and then faded against the grey while they talked. They were so domestic that Colville realised with difficulty that this was an image of what might be rather than what really was; the very ease with which he could apparently close his hand upon the happiness within his grasp unnerved him. The talk strayed hither and thither, and went and came aimlessly. A sound of singing floated in from the kitchen, and Effie eagerly asked her mother if she might go and see Maddalena. Maddalena's mother had come to see her, and she was from the mountains.

"Yes, go," said Mrs. Bowen; "but don't stay too long."

"Oh, I will be back in time," said the child, and Colville remembered that he had proposed going to Giacosa's.

"Yes; don't forget." He had forgotten it himself.

"Maddalena is the cook," explained Mrs. Bowen. "She sings ballads to Effie that she learned from her mother, and I suppose Effie wants to hear them at first-hand."

"Oh yes," said Colville dreamily.

They were alone now, and each little silence seemed freighted with a meaning deeper than speech.

"Have you seen Mr. Waters to-day?" asked Mrs. Bowen, after one of these lapses.

"Yes; he came this afternoon."

"He is a very strange old man. I should think he would be lonely here."

"He seems not to be. He says he finds company in the history of the place. And his satisfaction at having got out of Haddam East Village is perennial."

"But he will want to go back there before he dies."

"I don't know. He thinks not. He's a strange old man, as you say. He has the art of putting all sorts of ideas into people's heads. Do you know what we talked about this afternoon?"

"No, I don't," murmured Mrs. Bowen.

"About you. And he encouraged me to believe—imagine—that I might speak to you —ask—tell you that—I love you, Lina." He leaned forward and took one of the hands that lay in her lap. It trembled with a violence inconceivable in relation to the perfect quiet of her attitude. But she did not try to take it away. "Could you—do you love me?"

"Yes," she whispered; but here she sprang up and slipped from his hold altogether, as with an inarticulate cry of rapture he released her hand to take her in his arms.

He followed her a pace or two. "And you will—will be my wife?" he pursued eagerly.

"Never!" she answered, and now Colville stopped short, while a cold bewilderment bathed him from head to foot. It must be some sort of jest, though he could not tell where the humour was, and he could not treat it otherwise than seriously.

"Lina, I have loved you from the first moment that I saw you this winter, and Heaven knows how long before!"

"Yes; I know that."

"And every moment."

"Oh, I know that too."

"Even if I had no sort of hope that you

cared for me, I loved you so much that I must tell you before we parted——"

"I expected that—I intended it."

"You intended it! and you do love me! And yet you won't—— Ah, I don't understand!"

"How could *you* understand? I love you—I blush and burn for shame to think that I love you. But I will never marry you; I can at least help doing that, and I can still keep some little trace of self-respect. How you must really despise me, to think of anything else, after all that has happened! Did you suppose that I was merely waiting till that poor girl's back was turned, as you were? Oh, how can you be yourself, and still be yourself? Yes, Jenny Wheelwright was right. You are too much of a mixture, Theodore Colville"—her calling him so showed how often she had thought of him so—"too much for her, too much for Imogene, too much for me; too much for any woman except some wretched creature who enjoys being trampled on and dragged through the dust, as you have dragged me."

"*I* dragged *you* through the dust? There hasn't been a moment in the past six months when I wouldn't have rolled myself in it to please you."

"Oh, I knew that well enough! And do you think that was flattering to me?"

"That has nothing to do with it. I only know that I love you, and that I couldn't help wishing to show it even when I wouldn't acknowledge it to myself. That is all. And now when I am free to speak, and you own that you love me, you won't—— I give it up!" he cried desperately. But in the next breath he implored, "*Why* do you drive me from you, Lina?"

"Because you have humiliated me too much." She was perfectly steady, but he knew her so well that in the twilight he knew what bitterness there must be in the smile which she must be keeping on her lips. "I was here in the place of her mother, her best friend, and you made me treat her like an enemy. You made me betray her and cast her off."

"I?"

"Yes, you! I knew from the very first that you did not really care for her, that you were playing with yourself, as you were playing with her, and I ought to have warned her."

"It appears to me you did warn her," said Colville, with some resentful return of courage.

"I tried," she said simply, "and it made it worse. It made it worse because I knew that I was acting for my own sake more than hers, because I wasn't—disinterested." There was something in this explanation, serious, tragic, as it was to Mrs. Bowen, which made Colville laugh. She might have had some perception of its effect to him, or it may have been merely from a hysterical helplessness, but she laughed too a little.

"But why," he gathered courage to ask, "do you still dwell upon that? Mr. Waters told me that Mr. Morton—that there was——"

"He is mistaken. He offered himself, and she refused him. He told me."

"Oh!"

"Do you think she would do otherwise, with you lying here between life and death? No: you can have no hope from that."

Colville, in fact, had none. This blow crushed and dispersed him. He had not strength enough to feel resentment against Mr. Waters for misleading him with this *ignis fatuus*.

"No one warned him, and it came to that," said Mrs. Bowen. "It was of a piece with the whole affair. I was weak in that too."

Colville did not attempt to reply on this point. He feebly reverted to the inquiry regarding himself, and was far enough from mirth in resuming it.

"I couldn't imagine," he said, that you cared anything for me when you warned another against me. If I could——"

"You put me in a false position from the beginning. I ought to have sympathised with her and helped her instead of making the poor child feel that somehow I hated her. I couldn't even put her on guard against herself, though I knew all along that she didn't really care for you, but was just in love with her own fancy for you. Even after you were engaged I ought to have broken it off; I ought to have been frank with her; it was my duty; but I couldn't without feeling that I was acting for myself too, and I would not submit to that degradation. No! I would rather have died. I dare say you don't understand. How could you? You are a man, and the kind of man who couldn't. At every point you made me violate every principle that was dear to me. I loathed myself for caring for a man who was in love with me when he was engaged to another. Don't think it was gratifying to me. It was detestable; and

yet I did let you see that I cared for you. Yes, I even *tried* to make you care for me—falsely, cruelly, treacherously."

"You didn't have to try very hard," said Colville, with a sort of cold resignation to his fate.

"Oh no; you were quite ready for any hint. I could have told her for her own sake that she didn't love you, but that would have been for my sake too; and I would have told you if I hadn't cared for you and known how you cared for me. I've saved at least the consciousness of this from the wreck."

"I don't think it's a great treasure," said Colville. "I wish that you had saved the consciousness of having been frank even to your own advantage."

"Do you dare to reproach me, Theodore Colville? But perhaps I've deserved this too."

"No, Lina, you certainly don't deserve it, if it's unkindness, from me. I won't afflict you with my presence: but will you listen to me before I go?"

She sank into a chair in sign of assent. He also sat down. He had a dim impression that he could talk better if he took her hand, but he did not venture to ask for it.

He contented himself with fixing his eyes upon as much of her face as he could make out in the dusk, a pale blur in a vague outline of dark.

"I want to assure you, Lina—Lina, my love, my dearest, as I shall call you for the first and last time !—that I *do* understand everything, as delicately and fully as you could wish, all that you have expressed, and all that you have left unsaid. I understand how high and pure your ideals of duty are, and how heroically, angelically, you have struggled to fulfil them, broken and borne down by my clumsy and stupid selfishness from the start. I want you to believe, my dearest love—you must forgive me !—that if I didn't see everything at the time, I do see it now, and that I prize the love you kept from me far more than any love you could have given me to the loss of your self-respect. It isn't logic—it sounds more like nonsense, I am afraid—but you know what I mean by it. You are more perfect, more lovely to me, than any being in the world, and I accept whatever fate you choose for me. I would not win you against your will if I could. You are sacred to me. If you say we must part, I know that you speak from a finer discernment than mine, and I

submit. I will try to console myself with the thought of your love, if I may not have you. Yes, I submit."

His instinct of forbearance had served him better than the subtlest art. His submission was the best defence. He rose with a real dignity, and she rose also. "Remember," he said, "that I confess all you accuse me of, and that I acknowledge the justice of what you do—because you do it." He put out his hand and took the hand which hung nerveless at her side. "You are quite right. Good-bye." He hesitated a moment. "May I kiss you, Lina?" He drew her to him, and she let him kiss her on the lips.

"Good-bye," she whispered. "Go——"

"I am going."

Effie Bowen ran into the room from the kitchen. "Aren't you going to take——" She stopped and turned to her mother. She must not remind Mr. Colville of his invitation; that was what her gesture expressed.

Colville would not say anything. He would not seize his advantage, and play upon the mother's heart through the feelings of her child, though there is no doubt that he was tempted to prolong the situation by any means. Perhaps Mrs. Bowen divined

both the temptation and the resistance. "Tell her," she said, and turned away.

"I can't go with you to-night, Effie," he said, stooping toward her for the inquiring kiss that she gave him. "I am—going away, and I must say good-bye."

The solemnity of his voice alarmed her. "Going away!" she repeated.

"Yes—away from Florence. I'm afraid I shall not see you again."

The child turned from him to her mother again, who stood motionless. Then, as if the whole calamitous fact had suddenly flashed upon her, she plunged her face against her mother's breast. "I can't *bear* it!" she sobbed out; and the reticence of her lamentation told more than a storm of cries and prayers.

Colville wavered.

"Oh, you must stay!" said Lina, in the self-contemptuous voice of a woman who falls below her ideal of herself.

XXIV.

IN the levities which the most undeserving husbands permit themselves with the severest of wives, there were times after their marriage when Colville accused Lina of never really intending to drive him away, but of meaning, after a disciplinary ordeal, to marry him in reward of his tested self-sacrifice and obedience. He said that if the appearance of Effie was not a *coup de théâtre* contrived beforehand, it was an accident of no consequence whatever; that if she had not come in at that moment, her mother would have found some other pretext for detaining him. This is a point which I would not presume to decide. I only know that they were married early in June before the syndic of Florence, who tied a tricolour sash round his ample waist for the purpose, and never looked more paternal or venerable than when giving the sanction of the Italian state to their union. It is not, of course, to be supposed that

Mrs. Colville was contented with the civil rite, though Colville may have thought it quite sufficient. The religious ceremony took place in the English chapel, the assistant clergyman officiating in the absence of the incumbent, who had already gone out of town.

The Rev. Mr. Waters gave away the bride, and then went home to Palazzo Pinti with the party, the single and singularly honoured guest at their wedding feast, for which Effie Bowen went with Colville to Giacosa's to order the ices in person. She has never regretted her choice of a stepfather, though when Colville asked her how she would like him in that relation she had a moment of hesitation, in which she reconciled herself to it; as to him she had no misgivings. He has sometimes found himself the object of little jealousies on her part, but by promptly deciding all questions between her and her mother in Effie's favour he has convinced her of the groundlessness of her suspicions.

In the absence of any social pressure to the contrary, the Colvilles spent the summer in Palazzo Pinti. Before their fellow-sojourners returned from the *villeggiatura* in the fall, however, they had turned their

faces southward, and they are now in Rome, where, arriving as a married couple, there was no inquiry and no interest in their past.

It is best to be honest, and own that the affair with Imogene has been the grain of sand to them. No one was to blame, or very much to blame; even Mrs. Colville says that. It was a thing that happened, but one would rather it had not happened.

Last winter, however, Mrs. Colville received a letter from Mrs. Graham which suggested, if it did not impart, consolation. "Mr. Morton was here the other day, and spent the morning. He has a parish at Erie, and there is talk of his coming to Buffalo."

"Oh, Heaven grant it!" said Colville, with sudden piety.

"Why?" demanded his wife.

"Well, I wish she was married."

"You have nothing whatever to do with her."

It took him some time to realise that this was the fact.

"No," he confessed; "but what do you think about it?"

"There is no telling. We are such simpletons! If a man will keep on long

enough—— But if it isn't Mr. Morton, it will be some one else—some *young* person."

Colville rose and went round the breakfast table to her. "I hope so," he said. "*I* have married a young person, and it would only be fair."

This magnanimity was irresistible.

THE END.

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Captain Jenness, of the sailing ship Aroostook, bound from Boston straight to Trieste, the old man asks the good-natured captain to take charge of his "little girl." The captain thinks the child may be "a bother on the voyage;" but, reflecting that he is used to children, consents, and the grandfather goes back to fetch Lydia. The captain's dismay when "the little girl" turns out to be a slim, beautiful, and well-dressed damsel, whom her confiding grandfather leaves solely in his charge on the day of sailing, is considerable, especially as he has already promised berths to three young men, two of them of excellent character and antecedents, the third a youth of dissipated habits, whom out of compassion he had consented to take to Europe, in order to try the reforming effects upon him of a sea-voyage. Lydia has a few pangs of lonely disappointment when she finds out that there is neither stewardess nor woman of any kind on board, and the sight of the young men is an uncomfortable surprise; but on the whole she is too ignorant and too guileless to feel the awkwardness of the situation as she should. And out of pure good feeling the young men, after the first shock, determined that, as far as in them lies, she shall never feel it.

The two friends Staniford and Dunham discuss the situation after the first common meal of the oddly assorted little company:—

"As Dunham lit his cigar at Staniford's on deck, the former said significantly, 'What a very American thing!' 'What a bore,' answered the other. Dunham had never been abroad, as one might imagine from his calling Lydia's presence a very American thing; but he had always consorted with people who had lived in Europe, he read the *Revue des Deux Mondes* habitually, and the London weekly newspapers, and this gave him the foreign standpoint from which he was fond of viewing his native world. 'It's incredible,' he added. 'Who in the world can she

be?' 'Oh, I don't know,' returned Staniford, with disgust; 'I should object to the society of such a person for a month or six weeks, under the most f able circumstances and with frequent respites; but imprisoned on the same ship with her, and to have one's mind and in one's way the whole time, is mor I bargained for. Captain Jenness should have to though, I suppose, he thought that if she could st we might. There's that point of view. But it ta ease and comfort out of the prospect.'"

At this point, however, the questionable youth Hicks, comes up to report all the gossip Lydia that he can glean from the cabin-boy immediately the sympathies of the two frien strongly in her favour. Hicks finds himself se snubbed, and Staniford concludes that Lydia protected presence among them is "plainly d supernatural innocence on the part of herse. her friends, which wouldn't occur among any people in the world but ours." They agree, as they are able, to "make her feel that th nothing irregular or uncommon in her being h she is." At the same time Staniford, the eld cleverer of the two friends, does not allo gentlemanly instincts to blind him to the com Lydia's Yankeeisms and curious bringing up. philosophically declares her beauty is only "p the general tiresomeness of the situation," and perpetual entertainment in speculating with Du as to the countrified views and feelings hidden the girl's quiet manner. Meanwhile the whol devotes itself to taking care of Lydia. Dun who is High Church, and engaged, befriend from a purely disinterested standpoint, the ca watches over her as he would over one of hi girls, the sailors show her little attentions cabin-boy fetches and carries for her, and even I now compulsorily sober and well-behaved,

himself pleasant and respectful. Only Staniford holds aloof. He has a turn for character-reading, and for a time prefers dissecting Lydia at a distance to making friends with her. Of course the aim of the story is to show how Staniford's indifference gives way first of all to the natural interest of a young man in a young girl; then to jealousy, and, lastly, to the mingled power of the young girl's beauty, helplessness, and genuine refinement of nature.

The only incident, properly so called, in the voyage is afforded by Hicks's outbreak of drunkenness at Gibraltar, and by Staniford's meeting with some fashionable friends of his at Messina. But every page is interesting, and Lydia's *tête-à-têtes*, now with Dunham, now with Staniford, her musical relations with Hicks, and the jealousy they arouse in Staniford, and through it all her innocence, her *naïveté*, her unconsciousness in the midst of a situation which would have proved intolerably embarrassing to any one less ignorant and unworldly, make up a charming picture. The plot begins to thicken towards the climax with the appearance of the Messina friends. Their astonishment recalls Staniford to the oddity of Lydia's position, and at the same time makes him feel by contrast the peculiar rarity and simplicity of her character. His love takes rapid and fiery shape, and only his chivalrous scruples prevent his proposing to her before they part at Trieste. He resolves, however, to take no advantage of her loneliness, and to wait till she is under her aunt's roof at Venice. The complications to which this leads, and the cruel way in which Lydia's eyes are opened at Venice to the social solecism she has committed in crossing the Atlantic without a chaperone, bring a vein of pathos into the story, and supply the necessary relief to the pretty little Utopia on board the Aroostook.—*The Times*

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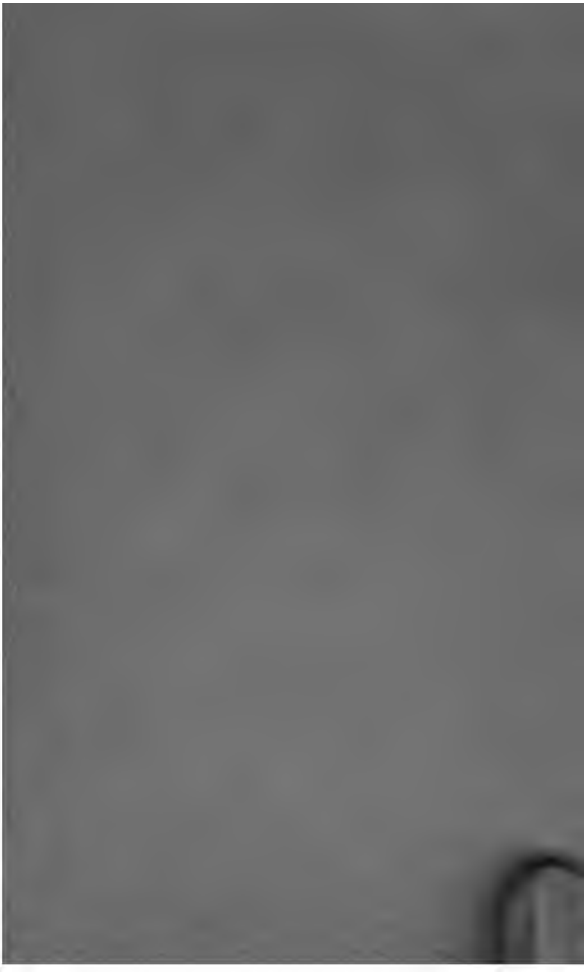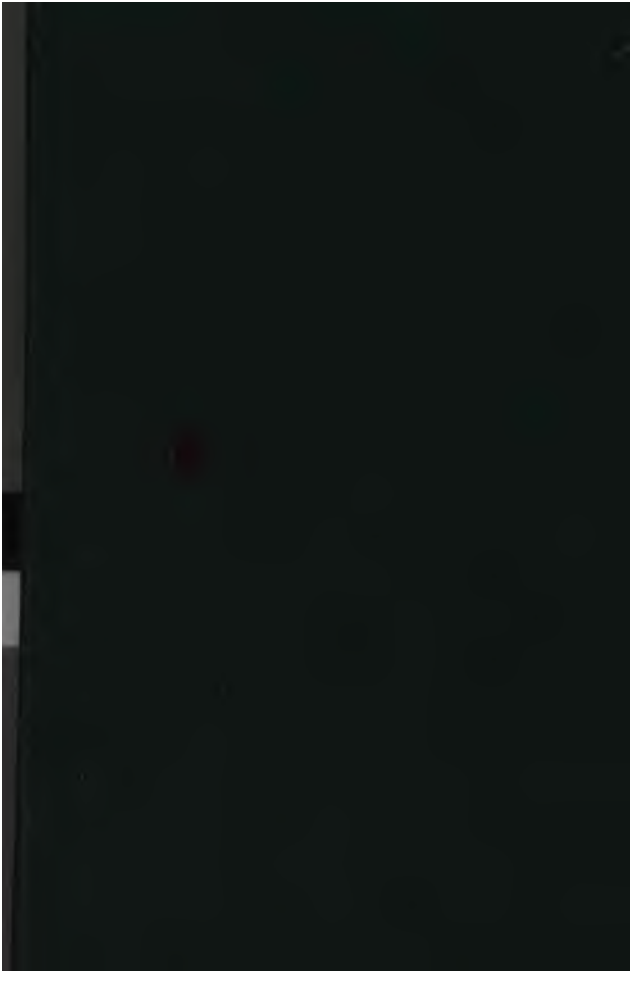
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